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THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY.

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THE

GOLDEN BUTTERFLY.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHORS OF

'READY-MONEY MORTIBOY,' 'THIS SON OF VULCAN,' 'MY LITTLE GIRL,'
'WITH HARP AND CROWN,' 'THE CASE OF MR. LUCRAFT,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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1876.
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THE

GOLDEN BUTTERFLY.

CHAPTER I.

'This fellow's of exceeding honesty,
And knows all qualities.'

It was the night of the Derby of 1875. The great race had been run, and the partisans of Galopin were triumphant. Those who had set their affections on other names had finished their weeping, because by this time lamentation, especially among those of the baser sort, was changed for a cheerful resignation begotten of much beer. The busy road was deserted, save for the tramps who plodded their weary way homeward; the moon, now in its third quarter, looked with sympathetic eye upon the sleeping forms which dotted the silent downs. These lay strewn like unto the bodies on a battle-field—they lay in

rows, they lay singly; they were protected from the night-dews by canvas tents, or they were exposed to the moonlight and the wind. All day long these people had plied the weary trade of amusing a mob; the Derby, when most hearts are open, is the harvest-day of those who play instruments, those who dance, those who tumble, those who tell fortunes. Among these honest artists sleeps the 'prentice who is going to rob the till to pay his debt of honour; the seedy betting-man in a drunken stupor; the boy who has tramped all the way from town to pick up a sixpence somehow; the rustic who loves a race; and the sharp-fingered lad with the restless eye and a pocket full of handkerchiefs. The holiday is over, and few are the heads which will awake in the morning clear and untroubled with regrets, remorse, or hot coppers. It is two in the morning, and most of the revellers are asleep. A few, still awake, are at the Burleigh Club; and among these are Gilead Beck, Ladds, and Jack Dunquerque.

They have been to Epsom. On the course the two Englishmen seemed, not unnaturally, to know a good many men. Some, whose voices were, oddly enough, familiar to Gilead Beck, shook hands with him and laughed. One voice—it belonged to a man in a light coat and a white hat—reminded him of

Thomas Carlyle. The owner of the voice laughed cheerfully when Beck told him so. Another made him mindful of John Ruskin. And the owner of that voice, too, laughed and changed the subject. They were all cheerful, these friends of Jack Dunquerque; they partook with affability of the luncheon and drank freely of the champagne. Also there was a good deal of quiet betting. Jack Dunquerque, Gilead Beck observed, was the least adventurous. Betting and gambling were luxuries which Jack's income would not allow him. Most other things he could share in, but betting was beyond him. Gilead Beck plunged, and won. It was a part of his Luck that he should win; but, nevertheless, when Galopin carried his owner's colours past the winning-post, Gilead gave a great shout of triumph, and felt for once the pleasures of the Turf.

Now it was all over. Jack and he were together in the smoking-room, where half a dozen lingered. Ladds was somewhere in the club, but not with them.

'It was a fine sight,' said Gilead Beck, on the subject of the race generally; 'a fine sight. In the matter of crowds you beat us: that I allow. And the horses were good: that I allow, too. But let me show you a trotting-race, where the grand little wiry

ner goes his measured mile in two minutes and a half. That seems to me better sport. But the Derby is a fine race, and I admit it. When I go back to America,' he went on, 'I shall institute races of my own—with a great National Dunquerque Cup—and we will have an American Derby, with trotting thrown in. There's room for both sports. What do you think, Mr. Dunquerque, of having sports from all countries?'

'Seems a bright idea. Take your bull-fights from Spain; your fencing from France; your racing from England—what will you have from Germany?'

'Playing at soldiers, I guess. They don't seem to care for any other game.'

'And Russia?'

'A great green table with a pack of cards and a roulette. We can get a few Egyptian bonds for the Greeks to exhibit their favourite game with. We may import a band of brigands for the Italian sports. Imitation murder will represent Turkish Delights, and the performers shall camp in Central Park. It wouldn't be bad fun to go out at night and hunt them. Say, Mr. Dunquerque, we'll do it. A permanent Exhibition of the Amusements of all Nations. You shall come over, if you like, and show them English fox-hunting. Where is Captain Ladds?'

'I left him hovering round the card-tables. I will bring him up.'

Presently Jack returned.

'Ladds is hard at work at *écarté* with a villanous-looking stranger. And I should think from the way Tommy is sticking at it, that Tommy is dropping pretty heavily.'

'It's an American he's playing with,' said one of the other men in the room. 'Don't know who brought him; not a member; a Major Hamilton Ruggles—don't know what service.'

Mr. Beck looked up quietly, and reflected a moment. Then he said softly to Jack,

'Mr. Dunquerque, I think we can have a little amusement out of this. If you were to go now to Captain Ladds, and if you were to bring him up to this same identical room with Major Hamilton Ruggles, I think, sir,—I do think you would see something pleasant.'

There was a sweet and winning smile on the face of Mr. Beck when he spoke these words. Jack immediately understood that there was going to be a row, and went at once on his errand, in order to promote it to the best of his power.

'You know Major Ruggles?' asked the first speaker.

'No, sir, no—I can hardly say that I know Major Ruggles. But I think he knows me.'

In ten minutes Ladds and his adversary at *écarté* came up-stairs. Ladds wore the heavy impenetrable look in which, as in a mask, he always played; the other, who had a limp in one leg and a heavy scar across his face, came with him. He was laughing in a high-pitched voice. After them came Jack.

At sight of Mr. Beck, Major Ruggles stopped suddenly.

'I beg your pardon, Captain Ladds,' he said. 'I find I have forgotten my handkerchief.'

He turned to go. But Jack, the awkward, was in his way.

'Handkerchief sticking out of your pocket,' said Ladds.

'So it is, so it is!'

By a sort of instinct the half-dozen men in the smoking-room seemed to draw their chairs and to close in together. There was evidently something going to happen.

Mr. Beck rose solemnly—surely nobody ever had so grave a face as Gilead P. Beck—and advanced to Major Ruggles.

'Major Ruggles,' he said, 'I gave you to understand, two days ago, that I didn't remember you. I

found out afterwards that I was wrong. I remember you perfectly well.'

'You used words, Mr. Beck, which—'

'Ay, ay—I know. You want satisfaction, Major. You shall have it. Sit down now, sit down, sir. We are all among gentlemen here, and this is a happy meeting for both of us. What will you drink? —I beg your pardon, Mr. Dunquerque, but I thought we were at the Langham. Perhaps you would yourself ask Major Ruggles what he will put himself outside of.'

The Major, who did not seem quite at his ease, took a seltzer-and-brandy and a cigarette. Then he looked furtively at Gilead Beck. He understood what the man was going to say and why he was going to say it.

'Satisfaction, Major? Wal, these gentlemen shall be witnesses. Yesterday mornin', as I was walkin' down the steps of the Langham Hotel, this gentleman, this high-toned whole-souled pride of the American army, met me and offered his hand. "Hope you are well, Mr. Beck," were his affable words. "Hope you are quite well. Met you last at Delmonico's, dining with Boss Calderon." Now, gentlemen, you'll hardly believe me when I tell you that I answered this politeness by askin' the Major

if he had ever heard of a Banco Steerer, and if he knew the meanin' of a Roper. He did not reply, doubtless because he was wounded in his feelin's—being above all things a man of honour *and* the boast of his native country. I then left him with a Scriptural reference, which p'r'aps he's overhauled since, and now understands what I meant when I said that, if I was to meet him goin' around arm-in-arm with Ananias and Sapphira, I'd say he was in good company.'

Here the Major jumped in his chair, and put his right hand to his shirt-front.

'No, sir,' said Beck, unmoved. 'I can tackle more'n one wild cat at once, if you mean fightin', which you do not. And it's no use, no manner o' use, feelin' in that breast-pocket of yours, because the shootin' irons in this country are always left at home. You sit still, Major, and take it quiet. I'm goin' to be more improvin' presently.'

'Perhaps, Beck,' said Jack, 'you would explain what a Banco Steerer and a Roper are.'

'I was comin' to that, sir. They air one and the same animal. The Roper or the Banco Steerer, gentlemen, will find you out the morning after you land in Chicago or Saint Louis. He will accost you—very friendly, wonderful friendly—when you

come out of your hotel, by your name, and he will remind you—which is most surprising, considerin' you never set eyes on his face before—how you have dined together in Cincinnati, or it may be Orleans, or perhaps Francisco, because he finds out where you came from last. And he will shake hands with you; and he will propose a drink; and he will pay for that drink. And presently he will take you somewhere else, among his pals, and he will strip you so clean that there won't be left the price of a four-cent paper to throw around your face and hide your blushes. In London, gentlemen, they do, I believe, the confidence trick. Perhaps Major Ruggles will explain his own method presently.'

But Major Ruggles preserved silence.

'So, gentlemen, after I'd shown my familiarity with the Ax of the Apostles, I went down town, thinkin' how mighty clever I was—that's a way of mine, gentlemen, which generally takes me after I've made a durned fool of myself. All of a sudden I recollected the face of Major Ruggles, and where I'd seen him last. Yes, Major, you *did* know me—you were quite right, and I ought to have kept Ananias out of the muss—you *did* know me, and I'd forgotten it. Those words of mine, Major, required explanation, as you said just now.'

'Satisfaction, I said,' objected the Major, trying to recover himself a little.

'Sir, you air a whole-souled gentleman; and your sense of honour is as keen as a quarter-dollar razor. Satisfaction you shall have; and if you are not satisfied when I have done with you, ask these gentlemen around what an American nobleman—one of the noblemen like yourself that we do sometimes show the world—wants more, and that more you shall git.

'You did know me, Major; but you made a little mistake. It was not with Boss Calderon that you met me, because I do not know Boss Calderon; nor was it at Delmonico's. And where it was I am about to tell this company.'

He hesitated a moment.

'Gentlemen, I believe it is a rule that strangers in your clubs must be introduced by members. I was introduced by my friend Mr. Dunquerque, and I hope I shall not disgrace that introduction. May I ask who introduced Major Ruggles?'

Nobody knew. In fact he had passed in with an acquaintance picked up somehow, and stayed there.

The Major tried again to get away.

'This is fooling,' he said. 'Captain Ladds, do

you wish me to be insulted? If you do, sir, say so. You will find that an American officer—'

'Silence, sir!' said Mr. Beck. 'An American officer! Say that again, and I will teach you to respect the name of an American officer. I've been a private soldier myself in that army,' he added, by way of explanation. 'Now, Major Ruggles, I am going to invite you to remain while I tell these gentlemen a little story—a very little story—but it concerns you. And if Captain Ladds likes, when that story is finished, I will apologise to you, and to him, and to all this honourable company.'

'Let us hear the story,' said Jack. 'Nothing could be fairer.'

'Nothing!' echoed the little circle of listeners.

Beck addressed the room in general, occasionally pointing the finger of emphasis at the unfortunate Major. His victim showed every sign of bodily discomfort and mental agitation. First he fidgeted in the chair; then he threw away his cigarette; then he folded his arms and stared defiantly at the speaker. Then he got up again.

'What have I to do with you and your story? Let me go. Captain Ladds, you have my address. And as for you, sir, you shall hear from me to-morrow.'

'Sit down, Major.' Gilead Beck invited him to

resume his chair with a sweet smile. 'Sit down. The night's young. Maybe Captain Ladds wants his revenge.'

'Not I,' said Ladds. 'Had enough. Go to bed. Not a revengeful man.'

'Then,' said Gilead Beck, his face darkening and his manner suddenly changing, 'I will take your revenge for you. Sit down, sir!'

It was an order he gave this time, not an invitation, and the stranger obeyed with an uneasy smile.

'It is not gambling, Major Ruggles,' Beck went on. 'Captain Ladds' revenge is going to be of another sort, I reckon.'

He drew close to Major Ruggles, and, sitting on the table, placed one foot on a chair which was between the stranger and the door.

'Delmonico's, was it, where we met last? And with Joe Calderon—Boss Calderon? Really, Major Ruggles, I was a great fool not to remember that at once. But I always am weak over faces, even such a striking face as yours. So we met last when you were dining with Boss Calderon, eh?'

Then Mr. Beck began his little story.

'Six years ago, gentlemen,—long before I found my Butterfly, of which you may have heard,—I ran

up and down the Great Pacific Railway between Chicago and Francisco for close upon six months. I did not choose that way of spendin' the golden hours, because, if one had a choice at all, a Pullman's sleeping-car on the Pacific Railway would be just one of the last places you would choose to pass your life in. I should class it, as a permanent home, with a first-class saloon in a Cunard steamer. No, gentlemen, I was on board those cars in an official capacity. I was conductor. It is not a proud position, not an office which you care to magnify; it doesn't lift your chin in the air and stick out your toes like the proud title of Major does for our friend squirmin' in the chair before us. Squirm on, Major; but listen, because this is interestin'. On those cars and on that railway there is a deal of time to be got through. I am bound to say that time kind of hangs heavy on the hands. You can't be always outside smokin'; you can't sleep more'n a certain time, because the nigger turns you out and folds up the beds; and you oughtn't to drink more'n your proper whack. Also you get tired watchin' the scenery. You may make notes if you like, but you get tired o' that. And you get mortal tired of settin' on end. Mostly, therefore, you stand around the conductor, and you listen to his talk.

'But six years ago the dulness of that long journey was enlivened by the presence of a few sportsmen like our friend the Major here. They were so fond of the beauties of Nature, they were so wrapped up in the pride of bein' American citizens and ownin' the biggest railway in the world, that they would travel all the way from New York to San Francisco, stay there a day, and then travel all the way back again. And the most remarkable thing was, that when they got to New York again they would take a through ticket all the way back to San Fran. This attachment to the line pleased the company at first. It did seem as if good deeds was going to meet their recompense at last even in this world, and the spirited conduct of the gentlemen when it first became known filled everybody with admiration.—You remember, Major, the very handsome remarks made by you yourself on the New York platform.

'Lord, is it six years ago? Why, it seems to me but yesterday, Major Ruggles, that I saw you standin' erect and bold—lookin' like a senator in a stove-pipe hat, store boots, and go-to-meetin' coat—shakin' hands with the chairman. "Sir," you said, with tears in your eyes, "you represent the advance of civilisation. We air now, indeed, ahead of the

hull creation. You have united the Pacific and the Atlantic. And, sir, by the iron road the West and the East may jine hands and defy the tyranny of Europe." Those, gentlemen, were the noble sentiments of Major Hamilton Ruggles.—Did I say, Major, that I would give you satisfaction? Wait till I have done, and you shall bust with satisfaction.'

The Major did not look, at all events, like being satisfied so far.

'One day an ugly rumour got about—you know how rumours spread—that the Great Pacific Railroad was a big gamblin' shop. The enthusiastic travellers up and down that line were one mighty confederated gang. They were up to every dodge: they travelled together, and they travelled separate; they had dice, and those dice were loaded; they had cards, and those cards were marked; they played on the square, but behind every man's hand was a confederate, and he gave signs, so that the honest sportsman knew how to play. And by these simple contrivances, gentlemen, they always won. So much did they win, that I have conducted a through train in which, when we got to Chicago, there wasn't a five-dollar piece left among the lot. And all the time strangers to each other. The gang never, by so much as a wink, let out that they had met before. And no

one could tell them from the ordinary passengers. But I knew; and I had a long conversation with the Directors one day, the result of which—Major Ruggles, perhaps you can tell these gentlemen what was the result of that conversation.'

The man was sallow. His sharp eyes gleamed with an angry light as he looked from one to the other, as if in the hope of finding an associate. There was none. Only Ladds, his late adversary, moved quietly round the room and sat near to Gilead Beck, on the table, but *nearer the door*. The Major saw this manœuvre with a sinking heart, because his pockets were heavy with the proceeds of the evening game.

'Well, gentlemen, a general order came for all the conductors. It was "No play." We were to stop that. And another general order was—an imperative order, Major, so that I am sure you will not bear malice—"If they won't leave off, chuck 'em out." That was the order, Major, "Chuck 'em out."

'It was on the journey back from San Francisco that the first trouble began. You were an upright man to look at then, Major; you hadn't got the limp you've got now, and you hadn't received that unfort'nate scar across your handsome face. You

were a most charmin' companion for a long railway journey, but you had that little weakness—that you *would* play. I warned you at the time. I said, "Cap'en, this must stop." You were only a Cap'en then. But you would go on. "Cap'en," I said, "if you will not stop, you will be chucked out." You will acknowledge, Major, that I gave you fair warnin'. You laughed. That was all you did. You laughed and you shuffled the cards. But the man who was playing with you got up. He saw reason. Then you drew out a revolver and used bad language. So I made for you.

'Gentlemen, it was not a fair fight. But orders had to be observed. In half a minute I had his pistol from him, and in two minutes more he was flyin' from the end of the train. We were goin' twenty miles an hour, and we hadn't time to stop to see if he was likely to get along somehow. And the last I saw of Captain Ruggles—I beg your pardon, Major—was his two heels in the air as he left the end of the train. I s'pose, Major, it was stoppin' so sudden gave you that limp and ornamented your face with that beautiful scar. The ground was gritty, I believe?'

Everybody's eyes were turned on the Major, whose face was livid.

'Gentlemen,' Mr. Beck continued, 'that aerial flight of Captain Ruggles improved the moral tone of the Pacific Railroad to a degree that you would hardly believe. I don't think there has been a single sportsman chucked out since.—Major Ruggles, sir, you were the blessed means, under Providence and Gilead P. Beck conjintly, of commencing a new and moral era for the Great Pacific Railroad.

'And now, Major, that my little story is told, may I ask if you air satisfied? Because if there is any other satisfaction in my power you shall have that too. Have I done enough for honour, gentlemen all?'

The men laughed.

'Now for a word with me,' Ladds began.

'Cap'en,' said Gilead Beck, 'let me work through this contract, if you have no objection.—Major Ruggles, you will clear out all your pockets.'

The miserable man made no reply.

'Clear out every one, and turn them inside out, right away.'

He neither moved nor spoke.

'Gentlemen,' Mr. Beck said calmly, 'you will be kind enough not to interfere.'

He pulled a penknife out of his pocket and laid it on a chair open. He then seized Major Ruggles

by the collar and arm. The man fought like a wild cat, but Beck's grasp was like a vice. It seemed incredible to the bystanders that a man should be so strong, so active, and so skilled. He tossed, rather than laid, his victim on the table, and then, holding both his hands in one grip of his own enormous fist, he deliberately ripped open the Major's trousers, waistcoat, and coat pockets, and took out the contents. When he was satisfied that nothing more was left in them he dragged him to the ground.

On the table lay the things which he had taken possession of.

'Take up those dice,' he said to Ladds. 'Try them; if they are not loaded, I will ask the Major's pardon.'

They were loaded.

'Look at those cards,' he went on. 'They are the cards you have been playing with, when you thought you had a new pack of club-cards. If they are not marked, I will ask the Major to change places with me.'

They were marked.

'And now, gentlemen, I think I may ask Captain Ladds what he has lost, and invite him to take it out of that heap.'

There was a murmur of assent.

'I lost twenty pounds in notes and gold,' said Ladds. 'And I gave an I O U for sixty more.'

There were other I O U's in the heap, and more gold when Ladds had recovered his own. The paper was solemnly torn up, but the coin restored to the Major, who now stood, abject, white, and trembling, but with the look of a devil in his eyes.

'Such men as you, Major,' said Gilead the Moralist, 'air the curse of our country. You see, gentlemen, we travel about, we make money fast; we air sometimes a reckless lot; the miners have got pockets full; there's everything to encourage such a crew as Major Ruggles belonged to. And when we find them out, we lynch them.—Lynch is the word, isn't it, Major?—Do you want to know the end of this man, gentlemen? I am not much in the prophetic line, but I think I see a crowd of men in a minin' city, and I see a thick branch with a rope over it. And at the end of that rope is Major Ruggles's neck tightened in a most unpleasant and ungentlemanly manner.—It's inhospitable, but what can you expect, Major? We like play, but we like playin' on the square. Now, Major, you may go. And you may thank the Lord on your knees before you go to sleep that this providential interference has taken place in London instead of the States. For had I

told my interestin' anecdote at a Bar in any City of the Western States, run up you would have been. You may go, Major Ruggles; and I daresay Cap'en Ladds, in consideration of the damage done to those bright and shinin' store clothes of yours, will forego the British kicking which I see tremblin' at the point of his toes.'

Ladds did forego that revenge, and the Major slunk away.

CHAPTER II.

'Nulla fere causa est in quâ non femina litem
Moverit.'

When Mr. Wylie the pamphleteer left Gabriel Cassilis, the latter resumed with undisturbed countenance his previous occupation of reading the letters and telegrams he had laid aside. Among them was one which he took up gingerly, as if it were a torpedo.

'Pshaw!' he cried impatiently, tossing it from him. 'Another of those anonymous letters. The third.' He looked at it with disgust, and then half involuntarily his hand reached out and took it up again. 'The third, and all in the same handwriting. "I have written you two letters, and you have taken no notice. This is the third. Beware! Your wife was with Mr. Colquhoun yesterday; she will be with him again to-day and to-morrow. Ask her, if you dare, what is her secret with him. Ask him what hold he has over her. Watch her, and caution her lest something evil befall you.—Your well-wisher."

'I am a fool,' he said, 'to be disquieted about an anonymous slander. What does it matter to me? As if Victoria—she did know Colquhoun before her marriage—their names were mentioned—I remember hearing that there had been flirtation—flirtation! As if Victoria could ever flirt! She was no frivolous silly girl. No one who knows Victoria could for a moment suspect—suspect! The word is intolerable. One would say I was jealous.'

He pushed forward his papers and leaned back in his chair, casting his thoughts behind him to the days of his stiff and formal wooing. He remembered how he said, sitting opposite to her in her cousin's drawing-room—there was no wandering by the river-bank or in pleasant gardens on summer evenings for those two lovers:

'You bring me fewer springs than I can offer you, Victoria;' which was his pretty poetical way of telling her that he was nearly forty years older than herself: 'but we shall begin life with no trammels of previous attachments on either hand.'

He called it—and thought it—at sixty-five beginning life; and it was quite true that he had never before conceived an attachment for any woman.

'No, Mr. Cassilis,' she replied; 'we are both free, quite free; and the disparity of age is only a

disadvantage on my side, which a few years will remedy.'

This cold stately woman conducting a flirtation before her marriage? This Juno among young matrons causing a scandal after her marriage? It was ridiculous.

He said to himself that it was ridiculous so often, that he succeeded at last in persuading himself that it really was. And when he had quite done that, he folded up the anonymous document, docketed it, and placed it in one of the numerous pigeon-holes of his desk, which was one of those which shut up completely, covering over papers, pigeon-holes, and everything.

Then he addressed himself again to business, and, but for an occasional twinge of uneasiness, like the first throb which presages the coming gout, he got through an important day's work with his accustomed ease and power.

The situation, as Lawrence Colquhoun told Victoria, was strained. There they were, as he put it, all three—himself, for some reason of his own, put first; the lady; and Gabriel Cassilis. The last was the one who did not know. There was no reason, none in the world, why things should not remain as

they were, only that the lady would not let sleeping dangers sleep, and Lawrence was too indolent to resist. In other words, Victoria Cassilis, having once succeeded in making him visit her, spared no pains to bring him constantly to her house, and to make it seem as if he was that innocent sort of *cicisbeo* whom English society allows.

Why?

The investigation of motives is a delicate thing at the best, and apt to lead the analyst into strange paths. It may be discovered that the philanthropist acts for love of notoriety; that the preacher does not believe in the truths he proclaims; that the woman of self-sacrifice and good works is consciously posing before an admiring world. This is disheartening, because it makes the cynic and the worldly-minded man to chuckle and chortle with an open joy. St. Paul, who was versed in the ways of the world, knew this perfectly when he proclaimed the insufficiency of good works. It is at all times best to accept the deed, and never ask the motive. And after all, good deeds are something practical. And as for a foolish or a bad deed, the difficulty of ascertaining an adequate motive only becomes more complicated with its folly or its villany. Mrs. Cassilis had everything to gain by keeping her old friend on the respectful

level of a former acquaintance; she had everything to lose by treating him as a friend. And yet she forced her friendship upon him.

Kindly people who find in the affairs of other people sufficient occupation for themselves, and whose activity of intellect obtains a useful vent in observation and comment, watched them. The man was always the same; indolent, careless, unmoved by any kind of passion for any other man's wife or for any maid. That was a just conclusion. Lawrence Colquhoun was not in love with this lady. And yet he suffered himself to obey orders; dropped easily into the position; allowed himself to be led by her invitations; went where she told him to go; and all the time half laughed at himself and was half angry to think that he was thus enthralled by a siren who charmed him not. To have once loved a woman; to love her no longer; to go about the town behaving as if you did: this, it was evident to him, was not a position to be envied or desired. Few false positions are. Perhaps he did not know that Mrs. Grundy talked; perhaps he was only amused when he heard of remarks that had been made by Sir Benjamin Backbite; and although the brief sunshine of passion which he once felt for this woman was long since past and gone, nipped in its very bud by the

lady herself perhaps, he still liked her cold and cynical talk. Colquhoun habitually chose the most pleasant paths for his lounge through life. From eighteen to forty there had been but one disagreeable episode, which he would fain have forgotten. Mrs. Cassilis revived it; but, in her presence, the memory was robbed somehow of half its sting.

Sir Benjamin Backbite remarked that though the gentleman was languid, the lady was shaken out of her habitual coldness. She was changed. What could change her, asked the Baronet, but passion for this old friend of her youth? Why, it was only four years since he had followed her, after a London season, down to Scotland, and everybody said it would be a match. She received his attentions coldly then, as she received the attentions of every man. Now the tables were turned; it was the man who was cold.

These social observers are always right. But they never rise out of themselves; therefore their conclusions are generally wrong. Victoria Cassilis was not, as they charitably thought, running after Colquhoun through the fancy of a wayward heart. Not at all. She was simply wondering where it had gone—that old power of hers, by which she once twisted him round her finger—and why it was gone.

A woman cannot believe that she has lost her power over a man. It is an intolerable thought. Her power is born of her beauty and her grace; these may vanish, but the old attractiveness remains, she thinks, if only as a tradition. When she is no longer beautiful she loves to believe that her lovers are faithful still. Now Victoria Cassilis remembered this man as a lover and a slave; his was the only pleading she had ever heard which could make her understand the meaning of man's passion; he was the only suitor whom a word could make wretched or a look happy. For he had once loved her with all his power and all his might. Between them there was the knowledge of a thing which, if any knowledge could, should have crushed out and beaten down the memory of this love. She had made it, by her own act and deed, a crime to remember it. And yet, in spite of all, she could not bring herself to believe that the old power was dead. She tried to bring him again under her influence. She failed, but she succeeded in making him come back to her as if nothing had ever happened. And then she said to herself that there must be another woman, and she set herself to find out who that woman was.

Formerly many men had hovered—marriageable men, excellent *partis*—round the cold and statuesque

beauty of Victoria Pengelley. She was an acknowledged beauty; she brought an atmosphere of perfect taste and grace into a room with her; men looked at her and wondered; foolish girls, who knew no better, envied her. Presently the foolish girls, who had soft faces and eyes which could melt in love or sorrow, envied her no longer, because they got engaged and married. And of all the men who came and went there was but one who loved her, so that his pulse beat quicker when she came; who trembled when he took her hand; whose nerves tingled and whose blood ran swifter through his veins when he asked her, down in that quiet Scotch village, with no one to know it but her maid, to be his wife.

The man was Lawrence Colquhoun. The passion had been his. Now love and passion were buried in the ashes of the past. The man was impassible, and the woman, madly kicking against the fetters which she had bound around herself, was angry and jealous.

It is by some mistake of Nature that women who cannot love can yet be jealous. Victoria Pengelley's pulse never once moved the faster for all the impetuosity of her lover. She liked to watch it, this curious yearning after her beauty, this eminently masculine weakness, because it was a tribute to her

power; it is always pleasant for a woman to feel that she is loved as women are loved in novels—men's novels, not the pseudo-passionate school-girls' novels, or the calmly-respectable feminine tales where the young gentlemen and the young ladies are superior to the instincts of common humanity. Victoria played with this giant as an engineer will play with the wheels of a mighty engine. She could do what she liked with it. Samson was not more pliable to Delilah; and Delilah was not more unresponsive to that guileless strong man. She soon got tired of her toy, however. Scarcely were the morning and the evening the fifth day, when by pressing some unknown spring she smashed it altogether.

Now, when it was quite too late, when the thing was utterly smashed, when she had a husband and child, she was actually trying to reconstruct it. Some philosopher, probing more deeply than usual the mysteries of mankind, once discovered that it was at all times impossible to know what a woman wants. He laid that down as a general axiom, and presented it as an irrefragable truth for the universal use of humanity. One may sometimes, however, guess what a woman does not want. Victoria Cassilis, one may be sure, did not want to sacrifice her honour, her social standing, or her future. She was not intend-

ing to go off, for instance, with her old lover, even if he should propose the step, which seemed unlikely. And yet she would have liked him to propose it, because then she would have felt the recovery of her power. Now her sex, as Chaucer and others before him pointed out, love power beyond all other earthly things. And the history of queens, from Semiramis to Isabella, shows what a mess they always make of it when they do get power.

A curious problem. Given a woman, no longer in the first bloom of youth, married well, and clinging with the instincts of her class to her reputation and social position. She has everything to lose and nothing to gain. She cannot hope even for the love of the man for whom she is incurring the suspicions of the world, and exciting the jealousy of her husband. Yet it is true, in her case, what the race of evil-speakers, liars, and slanderers say of her. She is running after Lawrence Colquhoun. He is too much with her. She has given the enemy occasion to blaspheme.

As for Colquhoun, when he thought seriously over the situation, he laughed when it was a fine day, and swore if it was raining. The English generally take a sombre view of things because it is so constantly raining. We proclaim our impotence, the

lack of national spirit, and our poverty, until other nations actually begin to believe us. But Colquhoun, though he might swear, made no effort to release himself, when a word would have done it.

'You may use harsh language to me, Lawrence,' said Mrs. Cassilis—he never had used harsh language to any woman—'you may sneer at me, and laugh in your cold and cruelly impassive manner. But one thing I can say for you, that you understand me.'

'I have seen all your moods, Mrs. Cassilis, and I have a good memory. If you will show your husband that the surface of the ocean may be stormy sometimes, he will understand you a good deal better. Get up a little breeze for him.'

'I am certainly not going to have a vulgar quarrel with Mr. Cassilis.'

'A vulgar quarrel? Vulgar? Ah, vulgarity changes every five years or so. What a pity that vulgar quarrels were in fashion six years ago, Mrs. Cassilis!'

'Some men are not worth losing your temper about.'

'Thank you. I was, I suppose. It was very kind of you, indeed, to remind me of it, as you then did, in a manner at once forcible and not to be forgotten. Mr. Cassilis gets nothing, I suppose, but

east wind, with a cloudless sky which has the sun in it, but only the semblance of warmth. I got a good sou'-wester. But take care, take care, Mrs. Cassilis! You have wantonly thrown away once what most women would have kept—kept, Mrs. Cassilis! I remember when I was kneeling at your feet years ago, talking the usual nonsense about being unworthy of you. Rubbish! I was more than worthy of you, because I could give myself to you loyally, and you—you could only pretend!'

'Go on, Lawrence. It is something that you regret the past, and something to see that you *can* feel, after all.'

She stopped and laughed carelessly.

'Prick me, and I sing out. That is natural. But we will have no heroics. What I mean is, that I am well out of it; and that you, Victoria Cassilis, are—forgive the plain speaking—a foolish woman.'

'Lawrence Colquhoun has the right to insult me as he pleases, and I must bear it.'

It was in her own room. Colquhoun was leaning on the window; she was sitting on a chair before him. She was agitated and excited. He, save for the brief moments when he spoke as if with emotion, was languid and calm.

'I have no right,' he replied, 'and you know it.

Let us finish. Mrs. Cassilis, keep what you have, and be thankful.'

'What I have! What have I?'

'One of the best houses in London. An excellent social position. A husband said to be the ablest man in the City. An income which gives you all that a woman can ask for. The confidence and esteem of your husband—and a child. Do these things mean nothing?'

'My husband—O, my husband! He is insufferable sometimes, when I remember, Lawrence.'

'He is a man who gives his trust after a great deal of doubt and hesitation. Then he gives it wholly. To take it back would be a greater blow, a far greater blow, than it would ever be to a younger man—to such a man as myself.'

'Gabriel Cassilis only suffers when he loses money.'

'That is not the case. You cannot afford to make another great mistake. Success isn't on the cards after two such blunders, Mrs. Cassilis.'

'What do I want with success? Let me have happiness.'

'Take it; it is at your feet,' said Lawrence. 'It is in this house. It is the commonest secret. Every simple country woman knows it.'

'No one will ever understand me,' she sighed. 'No one.'

'It is simply to give up for ever thinking about yourself. Go and look after your baby, and find happiness there.'

Why superior women are always so angry if they are asked to look after their babies, I cannot understand. There is no blinking the fact that they have them. The maternal instinct makes women who cannot write or talk fine language about the domestic affections take to the tiny creatures with a passion of devotion which is the loveliest thing to look upon in all this earth. The *femme incomprise* alone feels no anguish if her baby cries, no joy if he laughs, and flies into a divine rage if you remind her that she is a mother.

'My baby!' cried Victoria, springing to her feet. 'You see me yearning for sympathy, looking to you as my oldest—once my dearest—friend, for a little—only a little—interest and pity, and you send me to my baby! The world is all selfish and cold-hearted, but the most selfish man in it is Lawrence Colquhoun!'

He laughed again. After all he had said his say.

'I am glad you think so, because it simplifies matters. Now, Mrs. Cassilis, we have had our little

confidential talk, and I think, under the circumstances, that it had better be the last. So, for a time, we will not meet, if you please. I do take a certain amount of interest in you—that is, I am always curious to see what line you will take next. And if you are at all concerned to have my opinion and counsel, it is this: that you've got your chance; and if you give that man who loves you and trusts you any unhappiness through your folly, you will be a much more heartless and wicked woman than even I have ever thought you. And, by gad, I ought to know!'

He left her. Mrs. Cassilis heard his step in the hall and the door close behind him. Then she ran to the window, and watched him strolling in his leisurely careless way down the road. It made her mad to think that she could not make him unhappy, and made her jealous to think that she could no longer touch his heart. Not in love with him at all—she never had been; but jealous because her old power was gone.

Jealous? There must be another girl. Doubtless Phillis Fleming. She ordered her carriage and drove straight to Twickenham. Agatha was having one of her little garden-parties. Jack Dunquerque was there with Gilead Beck. Also Captain Ladds.

But Lawrence Colquhoun was not. She stayed an hour; she ascertained from Phillis that her guardian seldom came to see her, and went home again in a worse temper than before, because she felt herself on a wrong track.

Tomlinson, her maid, had a very bad time of it while she was dressing her mistress for dinner. Nothing went right, somehow. Tomlinson, the hard-featured, was long-suffering and patient. She made no reply to the torrent which flowed from her superior's angry lips. But when respite came with the dinner-bell, and her mistress was safely downstairs, the maid sat down to the table and wrote a letter very carefully. This she read and re-read, and, being finally satisfied with it, she took it out to the post herself. After that, as she would not be wanted till midnight at least, she took a cab and went to the Marylebone Theatre, where she wept over the distresses of a lady ruined by the secret voice of calumny.

It was at the end of May, and the season was at its height. Mrs. Cassilis had two or three engagements, but she came home early, and was even sharper with the unfortunate Tomlinson than before dinner. But Tomlinson was very good, and bore all in patience. It is Christian to endure.

Next morning Gabriel Cassilis found among his letters another in the same handwriting as that of the three anonymous communications he had already received.

He tore it open with a groan.

'This is the fourth letter. You will have to take notice of my communications, and to act upon them, sooner or later. All this morning Mr. Colquhoun was locked up with your wife in her boudoir. He came at eleven and went away at half-past one. No one was admitted. They talked of many things—of their Scotch secret especially, and how to hide it from you. I shall keep you informed of what they do. At half-past two Mrs. Cassilis ordered the carriage and drove to Twickenham. Mr. Colquhoun has got his ward there, Miss Fleming. So that doubtless she went to meet him again. In the evening she came home in a very bad temper, because she had failed to meet him. She had hoped to see him three times at least this very day. Surely, surely even your blind confidence cannot stand a continuation of this kind of thing. All the world knows it except yourself. You may be rich and generous to her, but she doesn't love you. And she doesn't care for her child. She hasn't asked to see it for three days—think of that. There is a pretty

mother for you! She ill-treats her maid, who is a *most faithful honest person, and devoted to your interests*. She is hated by every servant in the house. She is a cold-hearted cruel woman. And even if she loves Mr. Colquhoun, it can only be through jealousy, and because she won't let him marry anybody else, even if he wanted to. But things are coming to a crisis. Wait!'

Mr. Mowll came in with a packet of papers, and found his master staring straight before him into space. He spoke to him, but received no answer. Then he touched him gently on the arm. Mr. Cassilis started, and looked round hastily. His first movement was to lay his hand upon a letter on the desk.

'What is it, Mowll—what is it? I was thinking—I was thinking. I am not very well to-day, Mowll.'

'You have been working too hard, sir,' said his secretary.

'Yes—yes. It is nothing. Now, then, let us look at what you have brought.'

For two hours Mr. Cassilis worked with his secretary. He had the faculty of rapid and decisive work. And he had the eye of a hawk. They were two hours of good work, and the secretary's notes were volumin-

ous. Suddenly the financier stopped—the work half done. It was as if the machinery of a clock were to go wrong without warning.

'So,' he said, with an effort, 'I think we will stop for to-day. Put all these matters at work, Mowll. I shall go home and rest.'

A thing he had never done before in all his life.

He went back to his house. His wife was at home and alone. They had luncheon together, and drove out in the afternoon. Her calm and stately pride drove the jealous doubts from his troubled mind as the sun chases away the mists of morning.

CHAPTER III.

'An excellent play.'

Such things as dinners to Literature were the relaxations of Gilead Beck's serious life. His real business was to find an object worthy of that enormous income of which he found himself the trustee. The most sympathetic man of his acquaintance, although it was difficult to make him regard any subject seriously, was Jack Dunquerque, and to him he confided his anxieties and difficulties.

'I can't fix it,' he groaned. 'I can't fix it anyhow.'

Jack knew what he meant, but waited for further light, like him who readeth an acrostic.

'The more I look at that growin' pile—there's enough now to build the White House over again—the more I misdoubt myself.'

'Where have you got it all?'

'In Government Stocks—by the help of Mr. Cassilis. No more of the unholy traffic in shares which you buy to sell again. No, sir. That means

makin' the widow weep and the minister swear; an' I don't know which spectacle of those two is the more melancholy for a Christian man. All in stocks—Government Stocks, safe and easy to draw out, with the interest comin' in regular as the chant of the cuckoo-clock.'

'Well, can't you let it stay there?'

'No, Mr. Dunquerque; I can't. There's the voice of that blessed Inseck in the box there, night and day, in my ears. And it says, plain as speech can make it, "Do something with the money."'

'You have bought a few pictures.'

'Yes, sir; I have begun the great Gilead P. Beck collection. And when that is finished, I guess there'll be no collection on this airth to show a candle to it. But that's personal vanity. That's not what the Golden Butterfly wants.'

'Would he like you to have a yacht? A good deal may be chucked over a yacht. That is, a good deal for what we Englishmen call a rich man.'

'When I go home again I mean to build a yacht, and sail her over here and race your people at Cowes—all the same as the America, twenty years ago. But not yet.'

'There are a few trifles going about which run away with money. Polo, now. If you play polo

hard enough, you may knock up a pony every game. But I suppose that would not be expensive enough for you. You couldn't ride two ponies at once, I suppose, like a circus fellow?'

'Selfish luxury, Mr. Dunquerque,' said Gilead, with an almost prayerful twang, 'is not the platform of the Golden Butterfly. I should like to ride two ponies at once, but it's not to be thought of. And my legs are too long for any but a Kentucky pony.'

'Is the Turf selfish luxury, I wonder?' asked Jack. 'A good deal of money can be got through on the Turf. Nothing, of course, compared with your pile; but still you might make a sensible hole in it by judicious backing.'

Gilead Beck was as free from ostentation, vanity, and the desire to have his ears tickled as any man. But still he did like to feel that, by the act of Providence, he was separated from other men. An income of fifteen hundred pounds a day, which does not depend upon harvests, or on coal, or on iron, or anything to eat and drink, but only on the demand for rock-oil, which increases, as he often said, with the march of civilisation, does certainly separate a man from his fellows. This feeling of division saddened him; it imparted something of the greatness of soul which belongs even to the most unworthy

emperors; he felt himself bound to do something for the good of mankind while life and strength were in him. And it was not unpleasant to know that others recognised the vastness of his Luck. Therefore, when Jack Dunquerque spoke as if the Turf were a gulf which might be filled up with his fortune, while it swallowed, without growing sensibly more shallow, all the smaller fortunes yearly shot into it like the rubbish on the future site of a suburban villa, Gilead Beck smiled. Such recognition from this young man was doubly pleasant to him on account of his unbounded affection for him. Jack Dunquerque had saved his life. Jack Dunquerque treated him as an equal and a friend. Jack Dunquerque wanted nothing of him, and, poor as he was, would accept nothing of him. Jack Dunquerque was the first, as he was also the most favourable, specimen he had met of the class which may be poor, but does not seem to care for more money; the class which no longer works for increase of fortune.

'No, sir,' said Gilead. 'I do not understand the Turf. When I go home I shall rear horses and improve the breed. Maybe I may run a horse in a trotting-match at Saratoga.'

In the mornings this American, in search of a Worthy Object, devoted his time to making the

round of hospitals, London societies, and charities of all kinds. He asked what they did, and why they did it. He made remarks which were generally unpleasant to the employés of the societies; he went away without offering the smallest donation; and he returned moodily to the Langham Hotel.

'The English,' he said, after a fortnight of these investigations, 'air the most kind-hearted people in the hull world. We are charitable, and I believe the Germans, when they are not officers in their own army, are a well-disposed folk. But in America, when a man tumbles down the ladder, he falls hard. Here there's every contrivance for makin' him fall soft. A man don't feel handsome when he's on the broad of his back, but it must be a comfort for him to feel that his backbone isn't broke. Lord, Mr. Dunquerque! to look at the hospitals and refuges, one would think the hull Bible had got nothin' but the story of the Prodigal Son, and that every other Englishman was that misbehaved boy. I reckon if the young man had lived in London, he'd have gone home very slow—most as slow as ever he could travel. There'd be the hospitals, comfortable and warm, when his constitootion had broke down with too many drinks; there'd have been the convalescent home for him to enjoy six months of happy medita-

tion by the seaside when he was pickin' up again; and when he got well, would he take to the swine-herdin', or would he tramp it home to the old man? Not he, sir; he would go back to the old courses and become a Roper. Then more hospitals. P'r'aps when he'd got quite tired, and seen the inside of a State prison, and been without his little comforts for a spell, he'd have gone home at last—just as I did, for I was the prodigal son without the riotous livin'—and found the old man gone, leavin' him his blessin'. The elder one would hand him the blessin' cheerfully, and stick to the old man's farm. Then the poor broken-down sportsman—he'd tramp it back to London, get into an almshouse, with an allowance from a City charity, and die happy.

'There's another kind o' prodigal,' Mr. Beck went on, being in a mood for moralising. 'She's of the other sex. Formerly she used to repent when she thought of what was before her. There's a refuge before her now, and kind women to take her by the hand and cry over her. She isn't in any hurry for the cryin' to begin, but it's comfortable to look forward to; and so she goes on until she's ready. Twenty years' fling, maybe, with nothing to do for her daily bread; and then to start fair on the same level as the woman who has kept her self-respect and worked.

'I can't see my way clear, Mr. Dunquerque; I can't. It wouldn't do any kind of honour to the Golden Butterfly to lay out all these dollars in helpin' up them who are bound to fall—bound to fall. There's only two classes of people in this world—those who are goin' up, and those who are goin' down. It's no use tryin' to stop those who are on their way down. Let them go; let them slide; give them a shove down, if you like, and all the better, because they will the sooner get to the bottom, and then go up again till they find their own level.'

It was in the evening, at nine o'clock, when Gilead Beck made this oration. He was in his smaller room, which was lit only by the twilight of the May evening and by the gas-lamp in the street below. He walked up and down, talking with his hands in his pockets, and silencing Jack Dunquerque, who had never thought seriously about these or any other things, by his earnestness. Every now and then he went to the window and looked into the street below. The cabs rattled up and down, and on the pavement the customary sight of a West-end street after dark perhaps gave him inspiration.

'Their own level,' he repeated it. 'Yes, sir, there's a proper level for every one of us somewhere,

if only we can find it. At the lowest depth of all there's the airth to be ploughed, the hogs to be drove, and the corn to be reaped. I read the other day, when I was studying for the great dinner, that formerly, if a man took refuge in a town, he might stay there for a year and a day. If then he could not keep himself, they opened the gates and they ran him out on a plank; same way as I left Clearville City. Back to the soil he went—back to the plough. Let those who are going down hill get down as fast as they can, and go back to the soil.

'I've sometimes thought,' he went on, 'that there's a kind of work lower than agriculture. It is to wear a black coat and do copying. You take a boy and you make him a machine; tell him to copy, that is all. Why, sir, the rustic who feeds the pigs is a Solomon beside that poor critter. Make your poor helpless paupers into clerks, and make the men who've got arms and legs and no brains into farm-labourers. Perhaps I shall build a city and conduct it on those principles.'

Then he stopped because he had run himself down, and they began to talk of Phillis.

But it seemed to Jack a new and singular idea. The weak must go to the wall; but they might be helped to find their level. He was glad for once that

he had that small four hundred a year of his own, because, as he reflected, his own level might be somewhere on the stage where the manufacture by hand, say, of upper leathers, represents the proper occupation of the class. A good many other fellows, he thought, among his own acquaintance might find themselves accommodated with boards for the cobbling business near himself. And he looked at Gilead Beck with increased admiration as a man who had struck all this, as well as He, out of his own head.

Jack Dunquerque suggested educational endowments. Mr. Beck made deliberate inquiries into the endowments of Oxford and Cambridge, with a view of founding a grand National American University on the old lines, to be endowed in perpetuity with the proceeds of his perennial oil-fountains. But there were things about these ancient seats of learning which did not commend themselves to him. In his unscholastic ignorance he asked what was the good of pitting young men against each other, like the gladiators in the arena, to fight, like them, with weapons of no earthly modern use. And when he was told of fellowships given to men for life as a prize for a single battle, he laughed aloud.

He went down to Eton. He was mean enough

to say of the masters that they made their incomes by overcharging the butchers' and the grocers' bills, and he said that ministers, as he called them, ought not to be grocers; and of the boys he said that he thought it unwholesome for them that some should have unlimited pocket-money, and all should have unlimited tick. Also some one told him that Eton boys no longer fight, because they funk one another. So that he came home sorrowful and scornful.

'In my country,' he said, 'we have got no scholarships, and if the young men can't pay their professors they do without them and educate themselves. And in my country the boys fight. Yes, Mr. Dunquerque, you bet they do fight.'

It was after an evening at the Lyceum that Gilead Beck hit upon the grand idea of his life.

The idea struck him as they walked home. It fell upon him like an inspiration, and for the moment stunned him. He was silent until they reached the hotel. Then he called a waiter.

'Get Mr. Dunquerque a key,' he said. 'He will sleep here. That means, Mr. Dunquerque, that we can talk all night if you please. I want advice.'

Jack laughed. He always did laugh.

'It is a great privilege,' he said, 'advising Fortunatus.'

'It is a great privilege, Mr. Dunquerque,' returned Fortunatus, 'having an adviser who wants nothing for himself. See that pile of letters. Every one a begging letter, except that blue one on the top, which is from a clergyman. He's a powerful generous man, sir. He offers to conduct my charities at a salary of three hundred pounds a year.'

Mr. Beck then proceeded to unfold the great idea which had sprung up, full grown, in his brain.

'That man, sir,' he said, meaning Henry Irving, 'is a grand actor. And they are using him up. He wants rest.

'I was an actor myself once, and I've loved the boards ever since. I was not a great actor. I am bound to say that I did not act like Mr. Henry Irving. Quite the contrary. Once I was the hind legs of an elephant. Perhaps Mr. Irving himself, when he was a 'prentice, was the fore legs. I was on the boards for a month, when the company busted up. Most things did bust up that I had to do with in those days. I was the lawyer in *Flowers of the Forest*. I was the demon with the keg to Mr. Jefferson's Rip Van Winkle. Once I played Horatio. That was when the Mayor of Constantinople City inaugurated his year of office by playin' Hamlet. He'd always been fond of the stage, that Mayor, but through

bein' in the soft-goods line never could find time to go on. So when he got the chance, bein' then a matter of four-and-fifty, of course he took it. And he elected to play Hamlet, just to show the citizens what a whole-souled Mayor they'd got, and the people in general what good play-actin' meant. The corporation attended in a body, and sat in the front row of what you would call the dress circle. All in store clothes and go-to-meetin' gloves. It was a majestic and an imposin' spectacle. Behind them was the Fire Brigade in uniform. The citizens of Constantinople and their wives and daughters crowded out the house.

'Wal, sir, we began. Whether it was they felt jealous, or whether they felt envious, that corporation laughed. They laughed at the sentinels, and they laughed at the moon. They laughed at the Ghost, and they laughed at me—Horatio. And then they laughed at Hamlet.

'I watched the Mayor gettin' gradually riz. Any man's dander would. Presently he rose to that height that he went straight to the footlights, and stood there facin' his own town council like a bull behind a gate.

'They left off laughing for a minute, and then they began again. We air a grave people, Mr. Dun-

querque, I am told, and the sight of those town councillors all laughin' together like so many free niggers before the war was most too much for any one.

'The Mayor made a speech that wasn't in the play.

"Hyar," he said, lookin' solemn. "You jest gether up your traps and skin out of this. I've got the say about this house, and I arn't a-goin' to have the folks incited to make game of their Mayor. So —you—kin—jist—light."

'They hesitated.

'The Mayor pointed to the back of the theatre.

"Git," he said again.

'One of the town councillors rose and spoke.

"Mr. Mayor," he began, "or Hamlet, Prince of Denmark—"

"Wal, sir," said the Mayor. "Didn't Nero play in his own theaytre?"

"Mr. Mayor, or Hamlet, or Nero," he went on, "we came here on the presumption that we were paying for our places, and bound to laugh if we were amused at the performance. Now, sir, this performance does amuse us considerable."

"You may presump," said the Mayor, "what you dam please. But git. Git at once, or I'll turn on the pumps."

'It was the Ghost who came to the front with the hose in his hands ready to begin.

'The town council disappeared before he had time to play on them, and we went on with the tragedy.

'But it was spoiled, sir, completely spoiled. And I have never acted since then.

'So you see, Mr. Dunquerque, I know somethin' about actin'. 'Tisn't as if I was a raw youngster starting a theatrical idea all at once. I thought of it to-night, while I saw a man actin' who has the real stuff in him, and only wants rest. I mean to try an experiment in London, and if it succeeds I shall take it to New York, and make the American Drama the greatest in all the world.'

'What will you do?'

'I said to myself in that theatre: "We want a place where we can have a different piece acted every week; we want to give time for rehearsals and for alteration; we want to bring up the level of the second-rate actors; we want more intelligence; and we want more care." Now, Mr. Dunquerque, how would you tackle that problem?'

'I cannot say.'

'Then I will tell you, sir. You must have three full companies. You must give up expecting that

Theatre to pay its expenses; you must find a rich man to pay for that Theatre; and he must pay up pretty handsome.'

'Lord de Molleteste took the Royal Hemisphere last year.'

'Had he three companies, sir?'

'No; he only had one; and that was a bad one. Wanted to bring out a new actress, and nobody went to see her. Cost him a hundred pounds a week till he shut it up.'

'Well, we will bring along new actresses too, but in a different fashion. They will have to work their way up from the bottom of the ladder. My Theatre will cost me a good deal more than a hundred pounds a week, I expect. But I am bound to run it. The idea's in my head strong. It's the thing to do. A year or two in London, and then for the States. We shall have a Grand National Drama, and the Ile shall pay for it.'

He took paper and pen, and began to write.

'Three companies, all complete, for tragedy and comedy. I've been to every theatre in London, and I'm ready with my list. Now, Mr. Dunquerque, you listen while I write them down.

'I say first company; not that there's any better or worse, but because one must begin with something.

'In the first I will have Mr. Irving, Mr. Henry Neville, Mr. William Farren, Mr. Toole, Mr. Emery, Miss Bateman, and Miss Nelly Farren.

'In the second, Mr. George Rignold—I saw him in *Henry V.* last winter in the States—Mr. Hare, Mr. Kendal, Mr. Lionel Brough, Mrs. Kendal, and that clever little lady, Miss Angelina Claude.

'In the third I will have Mr. Phelps, Mr. Charles Mathews, Mr. W. J. Hill, Mr. Arthur Cecil, Mr. Kelly, Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft, and Mrs. Scott-Siddons, if you could only get her.

'I should ask Mr. Alfred Wigan to be stage-manager and general director, and I would give him absolute power.

'Every company will play for a week and rehearse for a fortnight. The principal parts shall not always be played by the best actors. And I will not have any piece run for more than a week at a time.'

'And how do you think your teams would run together?'

'Sir, it would be a distinction to belong to that Theatre. And they would be well paid. They will run together just for the very same reason as everybody runs together—for their own interest.'

'I believe,' said Jack, 'that you have at last hit upon a plan for getting rid even of your superfluous cash.'

'It will cost a powerful lot, I believe. But Lord, Mr. Dunquerque! what better object can there be than to improve the Stage? Think what it would mean. The House properly managed; no loafin' around behind the scenes; every actor doing his darn best, and taking time for study and rehearsal; people comin' down to a quiet evening, with the best artists to entertain them, and the best pieces to play. The Stage would revive, sir. We should hear no more about the decay of the Drama. The Drama decay! That's bunkum, sir. That's the invention of the priests and the ministers, who go about down-cryin' what they can't have their own finger in.'

'But I don't see how your scheme will encourage authors.'

'I shall pay them too, sir. I should say to Mr. Byron: "Sir, you air a clever and a witty man. Go right away, sir. Sit down for a twelvemonth, and do nothin' at all. Then write me a play; put your own jokes in it, not old jokes; put your own situations in it, not old ones. Give me somethin' better." Then I should say to Mr. Gilbert: "Your

pieces have got the real grit, young gentleman; but you write too fast. Go away too for six months and do nothin'. Then sit down for six months more, and write a piece that will be pretty and sweet, and won't be thin." And there's more dramatists behind —only give them a chance. They shall have it at my House.'

'And what will the other houses do?'

'The other houses, sir, may go on playing pieces for four hundred nights if they like. I leave them plenty of men to stump their boards, and my Theatre won't hold more than a certain number. I shall only take a small house to begin with, such a house as the Lyceum, and we shall gradually get along. But no profit can be made by such a Stage, and I am ready to give half my Ile to keep it goin'. Of course,' he added, 'when it is a success in London I shall carry it away, company and all, to New York.'

He rose in a burst of enthusiasm.

'Gilead P. Beck shall be known for his collection of pictures. He shall be known for his Golden Butterfly, and the Luck it brought him. But he shall be best known, Mr. Dunquerque, because he will be the first man to take the Stage out of the mud of commercial enterprise, and raise it to be the great

educator of the people. He shall be known as the founder of the Grand National American Drama. And his bust shall be planted on the top of every American stage.'

CHAPTER IV.

'In such a cause who would not give? What heart
But leaps at such a name?'

People of rank and position are apt to complain of begging-letters. Surely England must be a happy country since its rich people complain mostly of begging-letters; for they are so easily dropped into the waste-paper basket. A country squire—any man with a handle to his name and a place for a permanent address—is the natural prey and victim of the beggars. The lithographed letter comes with every post, trying in vain to look like a written letter. And though in fervid sentences it shows the danger to your immortal soul if you refuse the pleading, most men have the courage to resist. The fact is that the letter is not a nuisance at all, because it is never read. On the other hand, a new and very tangible nuisance is springing up. It is that of the people who go round and call. Sir Roger de Coverley in his secluded village is free from the women who give you the alternative of a day with

Moody and Sankey, or an eternity of repentance; he never sees the pair of Sisters got up like Roman Catholic nuns, who stand meekly before you, arms crossed, mutely refusing to go without five shillings at least for their Ritualist hot-house. But he who lives in chambers, he who puts up at a great hotel and becomes known, he who has a house in any address from Chester-square to Notting-hill, understands this trouble.

In some mysterious way Gilead Beck had become known. Perhaps this was partly in consequence of his habit of going to institutions, charities, and the like, and wanting to find out everything. In some vague and misty way it became known that there was at the Langham Hotel an American named Gilead P. Beck, who was asking questions philanthropically. Then all the people who live on philanthropists, with all those who work for their pleasure among philanthropists, began to tackle Gilead P. Beck. Letters came in the morning, which he read, but did not answer. Circulars were sent him, of which he perhaps made a note. Telegrams were even delivered for him—people somehow *must* read telegrams—asking him for money. Those wonderful people who address the Affluent in the *Times* and ask for 300*l.* on the security of an honest man's word; those unhappy

ladies whose father was a gentleman and an officer, on the strength of which fact they ask the Benevolent to help them in their undeserved distress, poor things; those disinterested advertisers who want a few hundreds, and who will give 15 per cent on the security of a splendid piano, a small gallery of undoubted pictures, and some unique china; those tradesmen who try to stave off bankruptcy by asking the world generally for a loan on the strength of a simple reference to the clergyman of St. Tinpot, Hammersmith; those artful dodgers, Mr. Ally Sloper and his friends, when they have devised a new and ingenious method of screwing money out of the rich,—all these people got hold of our Gilead, and pelted him with letters. Did they know, the ingenious and the needy, how the business is over-done, they would change their tactics and go round calling.

It requires a front of brass, entire absence of self-respect, and an epidermis like that of the rhinoceros for toughness, to undertake this work. Yet ladies do it. You want a temperament off which insults, gibes, sneers, and blank refusals fall like water off a nasturtium-leaf to go the begging-round. Yet women do it. They do it not only for themselves, but also for their cause. From Ritualism down to Atheism, from the fashionable enthusiasm to the

nihilism which the British workman is being taught to regard as the hidden knowledge, there are women who will brave anything, dare anything, say anything, and endure anything. They love to be martyred, so long especially as it does not hurt; they are angry with the lukewarm zeal of their male supporters, forgetting that a man sees the two sides of a question, while a woman never sees more than one; they mistake notoriety for fame, and contempt for jealous admiration.

And here, in the very heart of London, was a man who seemed simply born for the Polite Beggar. A man restless because he could not part with his money. Not seeking profitable investments, not asking for ten and twenty per cent; but anxious to use his money for the best purposes: a man who was a philanthropist in the abstract, who considered himself the trustee of a gigantic gift to the human race, and was desirous of exercising that trust to the best advantage.

In London; and at the same time, in the same city, thousands of people not only representing their individual distresses or their society's wants, but also plans, schemes, and ideas for the promotion of civilisation in the abstract. Do we not all know the projectors? I myself know at this moment six

men who want each to establish a daily paper; at least a dozen who would like a weekly; fifty who see a way by the formation of a new Society to check immorality, kill infidelity once for all, make men sober and women clean, prevent strikes and destroy Republicanism. There is one man who would 'save' the Church of England by establishing a preaching order; one who knows how to restore England to her place among the nations without a single additional soldier; one who burns to abolish bishops' aprons, and would make it penal to preach in a black gown. The land teems with idea'd men. They yearn, pray, and sigh daily for the capitalist who will reduce their idea to practice.

And besides the projectors, there are the inventors. I once knew a man who claimed to have invented a means for embarking and setting down passengers and goods on a railway without stopping the trains. Think of the convenience. Why no railways have taken up the invention, I cannot explain. Then there are men who have inventions which will reform the whole system of domestic appliances; there are others who are prepared on encouragement to reform the whole conduct of life by new inventions. There are men by thousands brooding over experiments which they have not money to carry out;

there are men longing to carry on experiments whose previous failure they can now account for. All these men are looking for a capitalist as for a Messiah. Had they known—had they but dimly suspected—that such a capitalist was in June of last year staying at the Langham Hotel, they would have sought that hotel with one consent, and besieged its portals. The world in general did not know Mr. Beck's resources. But they were beginning to find him out. The voice of rumour was spreading abroad his reputation. And the people wrote letters, sent circulars, and called.

'Twenty-three of them came yesterday morning,' Gilead Beck complained to Jack Dunquerque. 'Three-and-twenty, all with a tale to tell. No, sir' —his voice rose in indignation—'I did not give one of them so much as a quarter-dollar. The Luck of the Golden Butterfly is not to be squandered among the well-dressed beggars of Great Britain. Three-and-twenty, counting one little boy, who came by himself. His mother was a widow, he said, and he sat on the chair and sniffed. And they all wanted money. There was one man in a white choker who had found out a new channel for doing good—and one man who wished to recommend a list of orphans. The rest were women. And talk?

There's no name for it. With little books, and pencils, and bundles of tracks.'

While he spoke there was a gentle tap at the door.

'There's another of them,' he groaned. 'Stand by me, Mr. Dunquerque. See me through with it. Come in, come in. Good Lord!' he whispered, 'a brace this time. Will you tackle the young one, Mr. Dunquerque?'

A pair of ladies. One of them a lady tall and thin, stern of aspect, sharp of feature, eager of expression. She wore spectacles; she was apparently careless of her dress, which was of black silk a little rusty. With her was a girl of about eighteen, perhaps her daughter, perhaps her niece; a girl of rather sharp but pretty features, marked by a look of determination, as if she meant to see the bottom of this business, or know the reason why.

'You are Mr. Beck, sir?' the elder lady began.

'I am Gilead P. Beck, madam,' he replied.

He was standing before the fireplace, with his long hands thrust into his pockets, one foot on an adjacent chair, and his head thrown a little back—defiantly.

'You have received two letters from me, Mr.

Beck, written by my own hand, and—how many circulars, child?'

'Twenty,' said the girl.

'And I have had no answer. I am come for your answer, Mr. Beck. We will sit down, if you please, while you consider your answer.'

Mr. Beck took up a waste-paper basket which stood at his feet, and tossed out the whole contents upon the table.

'Those are the letters of yesterday and to-day,' he said. 'What was yours, madam? Was it a letter asking for money?'

'It was.'

'Yesterday there were seventy-four letters asking for money. To-day there are only fifty-two. May I ask, madam, if you air the widow who wants money to run a mangle?'

'Sir, I am unmarried. A mangle!'

He dug his hand into the pile, and took out one at random.

'You air, perhaps, the young lady who writes to know if I want a housekeeper, and encloses her carte-de-visite? No; that won't do. Is it possible you are the daughter of the Confederate general who lost his life in the cause?'

'Really, sir!'

'Then, madam, we come to the lady who'—here he read from another letter—'who was once a governess, and now is reduced to sell her last remaining garments.'

'Sir!'

There was a withering scorn on the lady's lips.

'I represent a Cause, Mr. Beck. I am not a beggar for myself. My cause is the sacred one of Womanhood. You, sir, in your free and happy Republic—'

Mr. Beck bowed.

'Have seen woman partially restored to her proper place—on a level with man.'

'A higher level,' murmured the girl, who had far-off eyes and a sweet voice. 'The higher level reached by the purer heart.'

'Only partially restored at present. But the good work goes on. Here we are only beginning. Mr. Beck, the Cause wants help—your help.'

He said nothing, and she went on.

'We want our rights; we want suffrage; we want to be elected for the Houses of Parliament; we insist on equality in following the professions and in enjoying the endowments of Education. We shall prove that we are no whit inferior to men. We want no privileges. Let us stand by ourselves.'

'Wal, madam, their air helpers who shove up, and I guess there air helpers who shove down.'

She did not understand him, and went on with increasing volubility.

'The subjection of the Sex is the most monstrous injustice of all those which blot the fair fame of manhood. What is there in man's physical strength that he should use it to lord over the weaker half of humanity? Why has not our sex produced a Shakespeare?'

'It has, madam,' said Mr. Beck gravely. 'It has produced all our greatest men.'

She was staggered.

'Your answer, if you please, Mr. Beck.'

'I have no answer, madam.'

'I have written you two letters, and sent you twenty circulars, urging upon you the claims of the Woman's Rights Association. I have the right to ask for a reply. I expect one. You will be kind enough, sir, to give categorically your answer to the several heads. This you will do of your courtesy to a lady. We can wait here while you write it. I shall probably, I ought to tell you, publish it.'

'We can wait,' said the young lady.

They sat with folded hands in silence.

Mr. Beck shifted his foot from the chair to the

carpet. Then he took his hands out of his pockets and stroked his chin. Then he gazed at the ladies steadily.

Jack Dunquerque sat in the background, and rendered no help whatever.

'Did you ever, ladies,' asked Mr. Beck after a few moments of reflection, 'hear of Paul Deroon of Memphis? He was the wickedest man in all that city. Which was allowed. He kept a bar where the whisky was straight and the language was free, and where Paul would tell stories, once you set him on, calculated to raise on end the hair of your best sofa. When the Crusade began—I mean the Whisky Crusade—the ladies naturally began with Paul Deroon's saloon.'

'This is very tedious, my dear,' said the elder lady in a loud whisper.

'How did Paul Deroon behave? Some barkeepers came out and cursed while the Whisky War went on; some gave in and poured away the Bourbon; some shut up shop and took to preachin'. Paul just did nothing. You couldn't tell from Paul's face that he even knew of the forty women around him prayin' all together. If he stepped outside he walked through as if they weren't there, and they made a lane for him. If he'd been blind and

deaf and dumb, Paul Deroon couldn't have taken less notice.'

'We shall not keep our appointment, I fear,' the younger lady remarked.

'They prayed, preached, and sang hymns for a whole week. On Sunday they sang eighty strong. And on the seventh day Paul took no more notice than on the first. Once they asked him if he heard the singin'. He said he did; and it was very soothin' and pleasant. Said, too, that he liked music to his drink. Then they asked him if he heard the prayers. He said he did; said, too, that it was cool work sittin' in the shade and listenin'; also that it kinder seemed as if it was bound to do somebody or other good some day. Then they told him that the ladies were waitin' to see him converted. He said it was very kind of them, and, for his own part, he didn't mind meetin' their wishes half-way, and would wait as long as they did.'

The ladies rose. Said the elder lady viciously: 'You are unworthy, sir, to represent your great country. You are a common scoffer.'

'General Schenck represents my country, madam.'

'You are unworthy of being associated with a great Cause. We have wasted our time upon you.'

Their departure was less dignified than their entry.

As they left the room another visitor arrived. It was a tall and handsome man, with a full flowing beard and a genial presence.

He had a loud voice and a commanding manner.

'Mr. Beck? I thought so. I wrote to you yesterday, Mr. Beck. And I am come in person—in person, sir—for your reply.'

'You air the gentleman, sir, interested in the orphan children of a colonial bishop?'

'No, sir, I am not. Nothing of the kind.'

'Then you air perhaps the gentleman who wrote to say that, unless I sent him a ten-pound note by return of post, he would blow out his brains?'

'I am Major Borington. I wrote to you, sir, on behalf of the Grand National Movement for erecting International Statues.'

'What is that movement, sir?'

'A series of monuments to all our great men, Mr. Beck. America and England, sir, have ancestors in common. We have our Shakespeare, sir, our Milton.'

'Yes, sir, so I have heard. I did not know those ancestors myself, having been born too late, and therefore I do not take that interest in their stone figures as you do.'

'Positively, Mr. Beck, you must join us.'

'It is your idea, Colonel, is it?'

'Mine, Mr. Beck. I am proud to say it is my own.'

'I knew a man once, Colonel, in my country who wanted to be a great man. He had that ambition, sir. He wasn't particular how he got his greatness. But he scorned to die and be forgotten, and he yearned to go down to posterity. His name, sir, was Hiram Turtle. First of all, he ambitioned military greatness. We went into Bull's Run together. And we came out of it together. We came away from that field side by side. We left our guns there too. If we had had shields, we should have left them as well. Hiram concluded, sir, after that experience, to leave military greatness to others.'

Major Borington interposed a gesture.

'One moment, Brigadier. The connection is coming. Hiram Turtle thought the ministry opened up a field. So he became a preacher. Yes; he preached once. But he forgot that a preacher must have something to say, and so the Elders concluded not to ask Hiram Turtle any more. Then he became clerk in a store while he looked about him. For a year or two he wrote poetry. But the papers in America, he found, were in a league against genius.

So he gave up that lay. Politics was his next move; and he went for stump-orating with the Presidency in his eye. Stumpin' offers amusement as well as gentle exercise, but it doesn't pay unless you get more than one brace of niggers and a bubbly-jock to listen. Wal, sir, how do you think Hiram Turtle made his greatness? He figured around, sir, with a List, and his own name a-top, for a Grand National Monument to the memory of the great men who fell in the Civil War. They air still subscribing, and Hiram Turtle is the great Patriot. Now, General, you see the connection.'

'If you mean, sir,' cried Major Borington, 'to imply that my motives are interested—'

'Not at all, sir,' said Mr. Beck; 'I have told you a little story. Hiram Turtle's was a remarkable case. Perhaps you might ponder on it.'

'Your language is insulting, sir!'

'Colonel, this is not a country where men have to take care what they say. But if you should ever pay a visit out West, and if you should happen to be about where tar and feathers are cheap, you would really be astonished at the consideration you would receive. No, sir, I shall not subscribe to your Grand National Association. But go on, Captain, go on. This is a charitable country, and the people haven't

all heard the story of Hiram Turtle. And what'll you take, Major ?'

But Major Borington, clapping on his hat, stalked out of the room.

The visits of the strong-minded female and Major Borington, which were typical, took place on the day which was the first and only occasion on which Phillis went to the theatre. Gilead Beck took the box, and they went—Jack Dunquerque being himself the fourth, as they say in Greek exercise-books—to the Lyceum, and saw Henry Irving play Hamlet.

Phillis brought to the play none of the reverence with which English people habitually approach Shakespeare, insomuch that while we make superhuman efforts to understand him we have lost the power of criticism. To her, George III.'s remark that there was a great deal of rubbish in Shakespeare would have seemed a perfectly legitimate conclusion. But she knew nothing about the great dramatist.

The house, with its decorations, lights, and crowd, pleased her. She liked the overture, and she waited with patience for the first scene. She was going to see a representation of life done in

show. So much she understood. Instead of telling a story the players would act the story.

The Ghost—perhaps because the Lyceum Ghost was so palpably flesh and blood—inspired her with no terror at all. But gradually the story grew into her, and she watched the unfortunate Prince of Denmark torn by his conflicting emotions, distraught with the horror of the deed that had been done and the deed that was to do, with a beating heart and trembling lip. When Hamlet with that wild cry threw himself upon his uncle's throne she gasped and caught Agatha by the hand. When the play upon the stage showed the King how much of the truth was known she trembled, and looked to see him immediately confess his crime and go out to be hanged. She was indignant with Hamlet for the slaughter of Polonius; she was contemptuous of Ophelia, whom she did not understand; and she was impatient when the two Gravediggers came to the front, resolute to spare the audience none of their somewhat musty old jokes and to abate nothing of the stage-business.

When they left the theatre, Phillis moved and spoke as in a dream. War, battle, conspiracy, murder, crime—all these things, of which her guardian had told her, she saw presented before her on the

stage. She had too much to think of; she had to fit all these new surroundings in her mind with the stories of the past. As for the actors, she had no power whatever of distinguishing between them and the parts they played. Irving was Hamlet; Miss Bateman was Ophelia; and they were all like the figures of a dream, because she did not understand how they could be anything but Hamlet, Ophelia, and the Court of Denmark.

And this too was part of her education.

CHAPTER V.

'Love in her eyes lay hiding,
His time in patience biding.'

'SQUARE it with Colquhoun before you go any farther,' said Ladds.

Square it with the guardian—speak to the young lady's father—make it all right with the authorities: what excellent advice to give, and how easy to follow it up! Who does not look forward with pleasure, or backward as to an agreeable reminiscence, to that half-hour spent in a confidential talk with dear papa? How calmly critical, how severely judicial, was his summing up! With what a determined air did he follow up the trail, elicited in cross-examination, of former sins! With how keen a scent did he disinter forgotten follies, call attention to bygone extravagancies, or place the finger of censure upon debts which never ought to have been incurred, and economies which ought to have been made!

Remember his 'finally'—a word which from childhood has been associated with sweet memories,

because it brings the sermon to an end, but which henceforth will awake in your brain the ghost of that *mauvais quart d'heure*. In that brief peroration he tore the veil from the last cherished morsel of self-illusion; he showed you that the furnishing of a house was a costly business, that he was not going to do it for you, that servants require an annual income of considerable extent, that his daughter has been brought up a lady, that lady's dress is a serious affair, that wedlock in due season brings babies, and that he was not so rich as he seemed.

Well, perhaps he said 'Yes' reluctantly, in spite of drawbacks. Then you felt that you were regarded by the rest of the family as the means of preventing dear Annabella from making a brilliant match. That humbled you for life. Or perhaps he said 'No.' In that case you went away sadly, and meditated suicide. And whether you got over the fit, or whether you didn't—though of course you did—the chances were that Annabella never married at all, and you are still regarded by the family as the cause of that sweet creature not making the exceptionally splendid alliance which, but for you, the disburbing influence, would have been her lot.

However, the thing is necessary, unless people run away, a good old fashion by which such inter-

views, together with wedding-breakfasts, wedding-garments, and wedding-presents, were avoided.

Running away is out of fashion. It would have been the worst form possible in Jack Dunquerque even to propose such a thing to Phillis, and I am not at all certain that he would ever have made her understand either the necessity or the romance of the thing. And I am quite sure that she would never understand that Jack Dunquerque was asking her to do a wrong thing.

Certainly it was not likely that this young man would proceed farther in the path of irregularity—which leads to repentance—than he had hitherto done. He had now to confess before the young lady's guardian something of the part he had played.

Looked at dispassionately, and unsoftened by the haze of illusion, this part had, as he acknowledged with groans, an appearance far from pleasing to the Christian moralist.

He had taken advantage of the girl's total ignorance to introduce himself at the house where she was practically alone for the whole day; he found her like a child in the absence of the reserve which girls are trained to; he stepped at once into the position of a confidential friend; he took her about for walks and drives, a thing which might have com-

promised her seriously; he allowed Joseph Jagenal, without, it is true, stating it in so many words, to believe him an old friend of Phillis's; he followed her to Twickenham, and installed himself at Mrs. L'Estrange's as an *ami de famille;* he had done so much to make the girl's life bright and happy, he was so dear to her, that he felt there was but one step to be taken to pass from a brother to a lover.

It was a black record to look at, and it was poor consolation to think that any other man would have done the same.

Jack Dunquerque, like Phillis herself, was changed within a month. Somehow the fun and carelessness which struck Gilead Beck as so remarkable in a man of five-and-twenty were a good deal damped. For the first time in his life he was serious; for the first time he had a serious and definite object before him. He was perfectly serious in an unbounded love for Phillis. Day by day the sweet beauty of the girl, her grace, her simple faith, her childlike affection sank into his heart and softened him. Day after day, as he rowed along the meadows of the Thames, or lazied under the hanging willows by the shore, or sat with her in the garden, or rode along the leafy roads by her side, the sincerity of her nature, as clear and cloudless as the blue depths of heaven;

its purity, like the bright water that leaps and bubbles and flows beneath the shade of Lebanon; its perfect truthfulness, like the midday sunshine in June; the innocence with which, even as another Eve, she bared her very soul for him to read—these things, when he thought of them, brought the unaccustomed tears to his eyes, and made his spirit rise and bound within him as to unheard-of heights. For love, to an honest man, is like Nature to a poet or colour to an artist—it makes him see great depths, and gives him, if only for once in his life, a Pisgah view of a Land far, far holier, a life far, far higher, a condition far, far sweeter and nobler than anything in this world can give us—except the love of a good woman. In such a vision the ordinary course of our life is suspended; we move on air; we see men as trees walking, and regard them not. Happy the man who once in his life has been so lifted out of the present, and knows not afterwards whether he was in the flesh or out of the flesh.

Jack with the influence of this great passion upon him was transformed. Fortunately for us this emotion had its ebb and flow. Else that great dinner to Literature had never come off. But at all times he was under its sobering influence. And it was in a penitent and humble mood that he sought Lawrence

Colquhoun, in the hope of 'squaring it' with him as Ladds advised. Good fellow, Tommy; none better; but wanting in the higher delicacy. Somehow the common words and phrases of every-day use applied to Phillis jarred upon him. After all, one feels a difficulty in offering a princess the change for a shilling in coppers. If I had to do it, I should fall back on a draft upon the Cheque Bank.

Lawrence was full of his own annoyances—most of us always are, and it is one of the less-understood ills of life that one can never get, even for five minutes, a Monopoly of Complaint. But he listened patiently while Jack—Jack of the Rueful Countenance—poured out his tale of repentance, woe, and prayer.

'You see,' he said, winding up, 'I never thought what it would come to. I dropped into it by accident, and then—then—'

'When people come to flirt, they stay to spoon,' said Lawrence. 'In other words, my dear fellow, you are in love. Ah!'

Jack wondered what was meant by the interjection. In all the list of interjections given by Lindley Murray, or the new light Dr. Morris, such as Pish! Pshaw! Alas! Humph! and the rest which are in everybody's mouth, there is none which blows

with such an uncertain sound as this. Impossible to tell whether it means encouragement, sympathy, or cold distrust.

'Ah!' said Lawrence. 'Sit down and be comfortable, Jack. When one is really worried, nothing like a perfect chair. Take my own. Now, then, let us talk it over.'

'It doesn't look well,' thought Jack.

'Always face the situation,' said Lawrence (he had got an uncommonly awkward situation of his own to face, and it was a little relief to turn to some one else's). 'Nothing done by blinking facts. Here we are. Young lady of eighteen or so—just released from a convent; ignorant of the world; pretty; attractive ways; rich, as girls go—on the one hand. On the other, you: good-looking, as my cousin Agatha L'Estrange says, though I can't see it; of a cheerful disposition—*aptus ludere*, fit to play, *cum puellâ*, all the day—'

'Don't chaff, Colquhoun; it's too serious.'

But Colquhoun went on:

'An inflammable young man. Well, with any other girl the danger would have been seen at once; poor Phillis is so innocent that she is supposed to be quite safe. So you go on calling. My cousin Agatha writes me word that she has been looking for the

light of love, as she calls it, in Phillis's eyes; and it isn't there. She is a sentimentalist, and therefore silly. Why didn't she look in your eyes, Jack? That would have been very much more to the purpose.'

'She has, now. I told her yesterday that I—I—loved Phillis.'

'Did she ask you to take the young lady's hand and a blessing at once? Come, Jack, look at the thing sensibly. There are two or three very strong reasons why it can't be.'

'Why it can't be!' echoed Jack dolefully.

'First, the girl hasn't come out. Now, I ask you, would it not be simply sinful not to give her a fair run? In any case you could not be engaged till after she has had one season. Then her father, who did not forget that he was grandson of a Peer, wanted his daughter to make a good match, and always spoke of the fortune he was to leave her as a guarantee that she would marry well. He never thought he was going to die, of course; but at all events I know so much of his wishes. Lastly, my dear Jack Dunquerque, you are the best fellow in the world, but you know—but—'

'But I am not Lord Isleworth.'

'That is just it. You are his lordship's younger

brother, with one or two between you and the title. Now don't you see? Need we talk about it any more?'

'I suppose Phil—I mean Miss Fleming—will be allowed to choose for herself. You are not going to make her marry a man because he happens to have a title and an estate, and offers himself?'

'I suppose,' said Lawrence, laughing, 'that I am going to lock Phillis up in a tower until the right man comes. No, no, Jack; there shall be no compulsion. If she sets her heart upon marrying you—she is a downright young lady—why, she must do it; but after she has had her run among the ball-rooms, not before. Let her take a look round first; there will be other Jack Dunquerques ready to look at, be sure of that. Perhaps she will think them fairer to outward view than you. If she does you will have to give her up in the end, you know.'

'I have said no word of love to her, Colquhoun, I give you my honour,' said Jack hotly. 'I don't think she would understand it if I did.'

'I am glad of that, at least.'

'If I am to give her up and go away, I daresay,' the poor youth went on, with a little choking in his throat, 'that she will regret me at first and for a day or two. But she will get over that; and—as

you say, there are plenty of fellows in the world better than myself—and—'

'My dear Jack, there will be no going away. You tell me you have not told her all the effect that her *beaux yeux* have produced upon you. Well, then—and there has been nothing to compromise her at all?'

'Nothing; that is, once we went to the Tower of London in a hansom cab.'

'O, that is all, is it? Jack Dunquerque—Jack Dunquerque!'

'And we have been up the river a good many times in a boat.'

'I see. The river is pleasant at this time of the year.'

'And we have been riding together a good deal. Phil rides very well, you know.'

'Does she? It seems to me, Jack, that my cousin Agatha is a fool, and that you have been having rather a high time in consequence. Surely you can't complain if I ask you to consider the innings over for the present?'

'No; I can't complain, if one may hope—'

'Let us hope nothing. Sufficient for the day. He who hopes nothing gets everything. Come out of it at once, Jack, before you get hit too hard.'

'I think no one was ever hit so hard before,' said Jack. 'Colquhoun, you don't know your ward. It is impossible for any one to be with her without falling in love with her. She is—' Here he stopped, because he could not get on any farther. Anybody who did not know the manly nature of Jack Dunquerque might have thought that he was stopped by emotion.

'We all get the fever some time or other. But we worry through. Look at me, Jack. I am forty, and, as you see, a comparatively hale and hearty man, despite my years. It doesn't shorten life, that kind of fever; it doesn't take away appetite; it doesn't interfere with your powers of enjoyment. There is even a luxury about it. You can't remember Geraldine Arundale, now Lady Newladegge, when she came out, of course. You were getting ready for Eton about that time. Well, she and I carried on for a whole season. People talked. Then she got engaged to her present husband, after seeing him twice. She wanted a Title, you see. I was very bad, that journey; and I remember that Agatha, who was in my confidence, had a hot time of it over the faithlessness of shallow hearts. But I got over the attack, and I have not been dangerously ill, so to speak, since. That is, I have made a contemptible

ass of myself on several occasions, and I daresay I shall go on making an ass of myself as long as I live. Because the older you grow, somehow, the sweeter do the flowers smell.'

Jack only groaned. It really is no kind of consolation to tell a suffering man that you have gone through it yourself. Gilead Beck told me once of a man who lived in one of the Southern States of America: he was a mild and placid creature, inoffensive as a canary bird, quiet as a mongoose, and much esteemed for his unusual meekness. This harmless being once got ear-ache—very bad ear-ache. Boyhood's ear-aches are awful things to remember; but those of manhood, when they do come, which is seldom, are the Devil. To him in agony came a friend, who sat down beside him, like Eliphaz the Temanite, and sighed. This the harmless being who had the ear-ache put up with, though it was irritating. Presently the Friend began to relate how he once had had the ear-ache himself. Then the harmless creature rose up suddenly, and, seizing an adjacent chunk of wood, gave that Friend a token of friendship on the head with such effect that he ceased the telling of that and all other stories, and has remained quite dumb ever since. The jury acquitted that inoffensive and meek creature, who wept when the ear-

ache was gone, and often laid flowers on the grave of his departed Friend.

Jack did not heave chunks of wood at Colquhoun. He only looked at him with ineffable contempt.

'Lady Newladegge! why, she is five-and-thirty! and she is fat!'

'She wasn't always five-and-thirty, nor was she always fat. On the contrary, when she was twenty, and I was in love with her, she was slender, and, if one may so speak of a Peeress, she was cuddlesome.'

'Cuddlesome!' Jack cried, his deepest feelings outraged. 'Good Heavens! to think of comparing Phil with a woman who was once cuddlesome!'

Lawrence Colquhoun laughed.

'In fifteen years, or thereabouts, perhaps you will take much the same view of things as I do. Meantime, Jack, let things remain as they are. You shall have a fair chance with the rest; and you must remember that you have had a much better chance than anybody else, because you have had the first running. Leave off going to Twickenham quite so much; but don't stop going altogether, or Phillis may be led to suspect. Can't you contrive to slack off by degrees?'

Jack breathed a little more freely. The house, then, was not shut to him.

'The young lady will have her first season next year. I don't say I hope she will marry anybody else, Jack, but I am bound to give her the chance. As soon as she really understands a little more of life she will find out for herself what is best for her perhaps. Now we've talked enough about it.'

Jack Dunquerque went away sorrowful. He expected some such result of this endeavour to 'square' it with Colquhoun, but yet he was disappointed.

'Hang it all, Jack,' said Ladds, 'what can you want more? You are told to wait a year. No one will step in between you and the young lady till she comes out. You are not told to discontinue your visits—only not to go too often, and not to compromise her. What more does the man want?'

'You are a very good fellow, Tommy,' sighed the lover; 'a very good fellow in the main. But, you see, you don't know Phil. Let me call her Phil to you, old man. There's not another man in the world that I *could* talk about her to—not one, by Jove; it would seem a desecration.'

'Go on, Jack—talk away; and I'll give you good advice.'

He did talk away! What says Solomon? 'Ointment and perfume rejoice the soul; so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.' The

Wise Man might have expressed himself more clearly, but his meaning can be made out.

Meantime Lawrence Colquhoun, pulling himself together after Jack went away, remembered that he had not once gone near his ward since he drove her to Twickenham.

'It is too bad,' said Conscience; 'a whole month.'

'It is all that woman's fault,' he pleaded. 'I have been dangling about, in obedience to her, like a fool.'

'Like a fool,' echoed Conscience.

He went that very day, and was easily persuaded to stay and dine with the two ladies.

He said very little, but Agatha observed him watching his ward closely.

After dinner she got a chance.

It was a pleasant evening, early in June. They had strawberries on a garden-table. Phillis presently grew tired of sitting under the shade, and strolled down to the river-side, where she sat on the grass and threw biscuits to the swans.

'What do you think, Lawrence?'

He was watching her in silence.

'I don't understand it, Agatha. What have you done to her?'

'Nothing. Are you pleased?'

'You are a witch; I believe you must have a familiar somewhere. She is wonderful—wonderful!'

'Is she a ward to be proud of and to love, Lawrence? Is she the sweetest and prettiest girl you ever saw? My dear cousin, I declare to you that I think her faultless. At least her very faults are attractive. She is impetuous and self-willed, but she is full of sympathy. And that seems to have grown up in her altogether in the last few months.'

'Her manner appears to me more perfect than anything I have ever seen.'

'It is because she has no self-consciousness. She is like a child still, my dear Phillis, so far.'

'I wonder if it is because she cannot read? Why should we not prohibit the whole sex from learning to read?'

'Nonsense, Lawrence. What would the novelists do? Besides, she is learning to read fast. I put her this morning into the Third Lesson Book—two syllables. And it is not as if she were ignorant, because she knows a great deal.'

'Then why is it?'

'I think her sweet nature has something to do with it; and, besides, she has been shielded from many bad influences. We send girls to school, and

—and—well, Lawrence, we cannot all be angels, any more than men. If girls learn about love, and establishments, and flirtations, and the rest of it, why, they naturally want their share of these good things. Then they get self-conscious.'

'What about Jack Dunquerque?' asked Lawrence abruptly. 'He has been to me about her.'

Agatha blushed as prettily as any self-conscious young girl.

'He loves Phillis,' she said; 'but Phillis only regards him as a brother.'

'Agatha, you are no wiser than little Red Riding-Hood. Jack Dunquerque is a wolf.'

'I am sure he is a most honourable, good young man.'

'As for good, goodness knows. Honourable no doubt, and a wolf. You are a matchmaker, you bad, bad woman. I believe you want him to marry that young Princess over there.'

'And what did you tell poor Jack?'

'Told him to wait. Acted the stern guardian. Won't have an engagement. Must let Phillis have her run. Mustn't come here perpetually trying to gobble up my dainty heiress. Think upon that now, cousin Agatha.'

'She could not marry into a better family.'

'Very true. The Dunquerques had an Ark of their own, I believe, at the Deluge. But then Jack is not Lord Isleworth; and he isn't ambitious, and he isn't clever, and he isn't rich.'

'Go on, Lawrence; it is charming to see you in a new character—Lawrence the Prudent!'

'Charmed to charm *la belle cousine*. He is in love, and he is hit as hard as any man I ever saw. But Phillis shall not be snapped up in this hasty and inconsiderate manner. There are lots of better *partis* in the field.'

Then Phillis came back, dangling her hat by its ribbons. The setting sun made a glory of her hair, lit up the splendour of her eyes, and made a clear outline of her delicate features and tall shapely figure.

'Come and sit by me, Phillis,' said her guardian. 'I have neglected you. Agatha will tell you that I am a worthless youth of forty, who neglects all his duties. You are so much improved, my child, that I hardly knew you. Prettier and—and—everything. How goes on the education?'

'Reading and writing,' said Phillis, 'do not make education. Really, Lawrence, you ought to know better. A year or two with Mr. Dyson would have done you much good. I am in words of two

syllables; and Agatha thinks I am getting on very nicely. I am in despair about my painting since we have been to picture-galleries. And to think how conceited I was once over it! But I *can* draw, Lawrence; I shall not give up my drawing.'

'And you liked your galleries?'

'Some of them. The Academy was tiring. Why don't they put all the portraits in one room together, so that we need not waste time over them?'

'What did you look at?'

'I looked at what all the other people pressed to see, first of all. There was a picture of Waterloo, with the French and English crowded together so that they could shake hands. It was drawn beautifully; but somehow it made me feel as if War was a little thing. Mr. Dyson used to say that women always take the grandeur and strength out of Art. Then there was a brown man with a sling on a platform. The platform rested on stalks of corn; and if the man were to throw the stone he would topple over, and tumble off his platform. And there was another one, of a row of women going to be sold for slaves; a curious picture, and beautifully painted, but I did not like it.'

'What did you like?'

'I liked some that told their own story, and made

me think. There was a picture of a moor—take me to see a moor, Lawrence—with a windy sky, and a wooden fence and a light upon it. O, I liked all the landscapes. I think our artists feel trees and sunshine. But what is my opinion worth?'

'Come with me to-morrow, Phillis; we will go through the pictures together, and you shall teach me what to like. Your opinion worth? Why, child, all the opinions of all the critics together are not worth yours.'

CHAPTER VI.

'What is it that has been done?'

These anonymous letters and this fit of jealousy, the more dangerous because it was a new thing, came at an awkward time for Gabriel Cassilis. He had got 'big' things in hand, and the eyes of the City, he felt, were on him. It was all-important that he should keep his clearness of vision and unclouded activity of brain. For the first time in his life his operations equalled, or nearly approached, his ambition. For the first time he had what he called a considerable sum in his hands. That is to say, there was his own money—he was reported to be worth three hundred thousand pounds—Gilead Beck's little pile, with his unlimited credit, and smaller sums placed in his hands for investment by private friends, such as Colquhoun, Ladds, and others. A total which enabled him to wait. And the share-market oscillating. And telegrams in cipher reaching him from all quarters. And Gabriel Cassilis unable to work, tormented by the one thought, like Io by her

gad-fly, attacked by fits of giddiness which made him cling to the arms of his chair, and relying on a brain which was active, indeed, because it was filled with a never-ending succession of pictures, in which his wife and Colquhoun always formed the principal figures, but which refused steady work.

Gabriel Cassilis was a gamester who played to win. His game was not the roulette-table, where the bank holds one chance out of thirty, and must win in the long-run; it was a game in which he staked his foresight, knowledge of events, financial connections, and calm judgment against greed, panic, enthusiasm, and ignorance. It was his business to be prepared against any turn of the tide. He would have stood calmly in the Rue Quincampoix, buying in and selling out up to an hour before the smash. And that would have found him without a single share in Law's great scheme. A great game, but a difficult one. It requires many qualities, and when you have got these, it requires a steady watchfulness and attention to the smallest cloud appearing on the horizon.

There were many clouds on the horizon. His grand *coup* was to be in Eldorado Stock. Thanks to Mr. Wylie's pamphlet they went down, and Gabriel Cassilis bought in—bought all he could;

and the Stock went up. There was a fortnight before settling-day.

They went up higher, and yet higher. El Señor Don Bellaco de la Carambola, Minister of the Eldorado Republic at St. James's, wrote a strong letter to the daily papers in reply to Mr. Wylie's pamphlet. He called attention to the rapid—the enormous—advance made in the State. As no one had seen the place, it was quite safe to speak of buildings, banks, commercial prosperity, and 'openings up.' It appeared, indeed, from his letters that the time of universal wealth, long looked for by mankind, was actually arrived for Eldorado.

The Stock went higher. Half the country clergy who had a few hundreds in the bank wanted to put them in Eldorado Stock. Still Gabriel Cassilis made no move, but held on.

And every day to get another of those accursed letters, with some new fact; every day to groan under fresh torture of suspicion; every day to go home and dine with the calm cold creature whose beauty had been his pride, and try to think that this impassive woman could be faithless!

This torture lasted for weeks; it began when Colquhoun first went to his house, and continued through May into June. His mental sufferings

were so great that his speech became affected. He found himself saying wrong words, or not being able to hit upon the right word at all. So he grew silent. When he returned home, which was now early, he hovered about the house. Or he crept up to his nursery, and played with his year-old child. And the nurses noticed how, while he laughed and crowed to please the baby, the tears came into his eyes.

The letters grew more savage.

He would take them out and look at them. Some of the sentences burned into his brain like fire.

'Mr. Lawrence Colquhoun is the only man she ever loved. Ask her for the secret. They think no one knows it.

'Does she care for the child—your child? Ask Tomlinson how often she sees it.

'When you go to your office, Mr. Colquhoun comes to your house. When you come home, he goes out of it. Then they meet somewhere else.

'Ask him for the secret. Then ask her, and compare what they say.

'Five years ago Mr. Lawrence Colquhoun and Miss Pengelley were going to be married. Everybody said so. She went to Scotland. He went after her. Ask him why.

'You are an old fool with a young wife. She loves your money, not you; she despises you because you are a City-man; and she loves Mr. Colquhoun.'

He sat alone in his study after dinner, reading these wretched things, in misery of soul. And a thought came across him.

'I will go and see Colquhoun,' he said. 'I will talk to him, and ask him what is this secret.'

It was about ten o'clock. He put on his hat and took a cab to Colquhoun's chambers.

On that day Lawrence Colquhoun was ill at ease. It was borne in upon him with especial force—probably because it was one of the sultry and thunderous days when Conscience has it all her own disagreeable way—that he was and had been an enormous Ass. By some accident he was acquainted with the fact that he had given rise to talk by his frequent visits to Victoria Cassilis.

'And to think,' he said to himself, 'that I only went there at her own special request, and because she likes quarrelling!'

He began to think of possible dangers, not to himself, but to her and to her husband, even old stories revived and things forgotten brought to light. And the thing which she had done came before him in its real shape and ghastliness—a bad and ugly

thing; a thing for whose sake he should have fled from her presence and avoided her; a thing which he was guilty in hiding. No possible danger to himself? Well, in one sense none; in every other sense all dangers. He had known of this thing, and yet he sat at her table; he was conscious of the crime, and yet he was seen with her in public places; he was almost *particeps criminis*, because he did not tell what he knew; and yet he went day after day to her house—for the pleasure of quarrelling with her.

He sat down and wrote to her. He told her that perhaps she did not wholly understand him when he told her that the renewed acquaintance between them must cease; that, considering the past and with an eye to the future, he was going to put it out of her power to compromise herself by seeing her no more. He reminded her that she had a great secret to keep unknown, and a great position to lose; and then he begged her to give up her wild attempts at renewing the old ties of friendship.

The letter, considering what the secret really was, seemed a wretched mockery to the writer, but he signed it and sent it by his servant.

Then he strolled to his club, and read the papers before dinner. But he was not easy. There was upon him the weight of impending misfortune. He

dined, and tried to drown care in claret, but with poor success. Then he issued forth—it was nine o'clock and still light—and walked gently homewards.

He walked so slowly that it was half-past nine when he let himself into his chambers in the Albany. His servant was out, and the rooms looked dismal and lonely. They were not dismal, being on the second floor, where it is light and airy, and being furnished as mediæval bachelorhood with plenty of money alone understands furniture. But he was nervous to-night, and grim stories came into his mind of spectres and strange visitors to lonely men in chambers. Such things happen mostly, he remembered, on twilight evenings in midsummer. He was quite right. The only ghost I ever saw myself was in one of the Inns of Court, in chambers, at nine o'clock on a June evening.

He made haste to light a lamp—no such abomination as gas was permitted in Lawrence Colquhoun's chambers; it was one of the silver reading-lamps, good for small tables, and provided with a green shade, so that the light might fall in a bright circle, beyond which was Cimmerian blackness shading off into the sepia of twilight. It was his habit, too, to have lighted candles on the mantel-

shelf and on a table; but to-night he forgot them, so that, except for the light cast upwards by the gas in the court and an opposite window illuminated, and for the half-darkness of the June evening, the room was dark. It was very quiet too. There were no footsteps in the court below, and no voices or steps in the room near him. His nearest neighbour, young Lord Orlebar, would certainly not be home much before one or two, when he might return with a few friends connected with the twin services of the army and the ballet for a little cheerful supper. Below him was old Sir Richard de Counterpane, who was by this time certainly in bed, and perhaps sound asleep. Very quiet—he had never known it more quiet; and he began to feel as if it would be a relief to his nerves were something or somebody to make a little noise.

He took a novel, one that he had begun a week ago. Whether the novel of the day is inferior to the novel of Colquhoun's youth, or whether he was a bad reader of fiction, certainly he had been more than a week over the first volume alone.

Now it interested him less than ever.

He threw it away and lit a cigar. And then his thoughts went back to Victoria. What was the devil which possessed the woman that she could not

rest quiet? What was the meaning of this madness upon her?

'A cold—an Arctic woman,' Lawrence murmured. 'Cold when I told her how much I loved her; cold when she engaged herself to me; cold in her crime; and yet she follows me about as if she was devoured by the ardour of love, like another Sappho.'

It was not that, Lawrence Colquhoun; it was the *spretæ injuria formæ*, the jealousy and hatred caused by the lost power.

'I wish,' he said, starting to his feet, and walking like the Polar bear across his den and back again, 'I wish to Heaven I had gone on living in Empire City with my pair of villanous Chinamen. At least I was free from her over there. And when I saw her marriage, by gad, I thought it was a finisher. Then I came home again.'

He stopped in his retrospection because he heard a foot upon the stairs.

A woman's foot; a light step and a quick step.

'May be De Counterpane's nurse. Too early for one of young Orlebar's friends. Can't be anybody for me.'

But it was; and a woman stopped at his doorway, and seeing him alone stepped in.

She had a hooded cloak thrown about an evening-dress; the hood was drawn completely over her face, so that you could see nothing of it in the dim light. And she came in without a word.

Then Colquhoun, who was no coward, felt his blood run cold, because he knew by her figure and by her step that it was Victoria Cassilis.

She threw back the hood with a gesture almost theatrical, and stood before him with parted lips and flashing eyes.

His spirits rallied a little then, because he saw that her face was white, and that she was in a royal rage. Lawrence Colquhoun could tackle a woman in a rage. That is indeed elementary, and nothing at all to be proud of. The really difficult thing is to tackle a woman in tears and distress. The stoutest heart quails before such an enterprise.

'What is this?' she began, with a rush as of the liberated whirlwind. 'What does this letter mean, Lawrence?'

'Exactly what it says, Mrs. Cassilis. May I ask, is it customary for married ladies to visit single gentlemen in their chambers, and at night?'

'It is not usual for—married—ladies—to visit—single—gentlemen, Lawrence. Do not ask foolish questions. Tell me what this means, I say.'

'It means that my visits to your house have been too frequent, and that they will be discontinued. In other words, Mrs. Cassilis, the thing has gone too far, and I shall cease to be seen with you. I suppose you know that people will talk.'

'Let them talk. What do I care how people talk? Lawrence, if you think that I am going to let you go like this, you are mistaken.'

'I believe this poor lady has gone mad,' said Lawrence quietly. It was not the best way to quiet and soothe her, but he could not help himself.

'You think you are going to play fast and loose with me twice in my life, and you are mistaken. You shall not. Years ago you showed me what you are—cold, treacherous, and crafty—'

'Go on, Victoria; I like that kind of thing, because now I know that you are not mad. Quite in your best style.'

'And I forgave you when you returned, and allowed you once more to visit me. What other woman would have acted so to such a man?'

'Yet she must be mad,' said Lawrence. 'How else could she talk such frightful rubbish?'

'Once more we have been friends. Again you have drawn me on, until I have learned to look to you, for the second time, for the appreciation denied

to me by my—by Mr. Cassilis. No, sir ; this second desertion must not and shall not be.'

'One would think,' said Lawrence helplessly, 'that we had not quarrelled every time we met. Now, Mrs Cassilis, you have my resolution. What you please, in your sweet romantic way, to call second desertion must be and shall be.'

'Then I will know the reason why.'

'I have told you the reason why. Don't be a fool, Mrs. Cassilis. Ask yourself what you want. Do you want me to run away with you? I am a lazy man, I know, and I generally do what people ask me to do ; but as for that thing, I am damned if I do it!'

'Insult me, Lawrence,' she cried, sinking into a chair. 'Swear at me, as you will.'

'Do you wish me to philander about your house like a ridiculous tame cat, till all the world cries out?'

She started to her feet.

'No!' she cried. 'I care nothing about your coming and going. But I know why—O, I know why!—you make up this lame excuse about my good name—*my* good name! As if you ever cared about that!'

'More than you cared about it yourself,' he retorted. 'But pray go on.'

'It is Phillis Fleming; I saw it from the very first. You began by taking her away from me, and placing her with your cousin, where you could have her completely under your own influence. You let Jack Dunquerque hang about her at first, just to show the ignorant creature what was meant by flirtation, and then you send him about his business. Lawrence, you are more wicked than I thought you.'

'Jealousy, by gad!' he cried. 'Did ever mortal man hear of such a thing? Jealousy! And after all that she has done—'

'I warn you. You may do a good many things. You may deceive and insult me in any way except one. But you shall never, never marry Phillis Fleming!'

Colquhoun was about to reply that he never thought of marrying Phillis Fleming, but it occurred to him that there was no reason for making that assertion. So he replied nothing.

'I escaped,' she said, 'under pretence of being ill. And I made them fetch me a cab to come away in. My cab is at the Burlington-gardens end of the court now. Before I go you shall make me a promise, Lawrence—you used to keep your promises—to act as if this miserable letter had not been written.'

'I shall promise nothing of the kind.'

'Then remember, Lawrence—you *shall never marry Phillis Fleming!* Not if I have to stop it by proclaiming my own disgrace—you shall not marry that girl, or any other girl. I have that power over you, at any rate. Now I shall go.'

'There is some one on the stairs,' said Lawrence quietly. 'Perhaps he is coming here. You had better not be seen. Best go into the other room and wait.'

There was only one objection to her waiting in the other room, and that was that the door was on the opposite side; that the outer oak was wide open; that the step upon the stairs was already the step upon the landing; and that the owner of the step was already entering the room.

Mrs. Cassilis instinctively shrank back into the darkest corner—that near the window. The curtains were of some light-coloured stuff. She drew them closely round her and cowered down, covering her head with the hood, like Guinevere before her injured lord. For the late caller was no other than her own husband, Gabriel Cassilis.

As he stood in the doorway the light of the reading-lamp—Mrs. Cassilis in one of her gestures had tilted up the shade—fell upon his pale face and

stooping form. Colquhoun noticed that he stooped more than usual, and that his grave face bore an anxious look—such a look as one sees sometimes in the faces of men who have long suffered grievous bodily pain. He hesitated for a moment, tapping his knuckles with his double eyeglasses, his habitual gesture.

'I came up this evening, Colquhoun. Are you quite alone?'

'As you see, Mr. Cassilis,' said Colquhoun. He looked hastily round the room. In the corner he saw the dim outline of the crouching form. He adjusted the shade, and turned the lamp a little lower. The gas in the chambers on the other side of the narrow court was put out, and the room was almost dark. 'As you see, Mr. Cassilis. And what gives me the pleasure of this late call from you?'

'I thought I would come—I came to say—' he stopped helplessly, and threw himself into a chair. It was a chair standing near the corner in which his wife was crouching; and he pushed it back until he might have heard her breathing close to his ear, and, if he had put forth his hand, might have touched her.

'Glad to see you always, Mr. Cassilis. You came to speak about some money matters? I have

an engagement in five minutes; but we shall have time, I daresay.'

'An engagement? Ah! a lady, perhaps.' This with a forced laugh, because he was thinking of his wife.

'A lady? Yes—yes, a lady.'

'Young men—young men—' said Gabriel Cassilis. 'Well, I will not keep you. I came here to speak to you about—about my wife.'

'O Lord!' cried Lawrence. 'I beg your pardon—about Mrs. Cassilis?'

'Yes; it is a very stupid business. You have known her for a long time.'

'I have, Mr. Cassilis; for nearly eight years.'

'Ah, old friends; and once, I believe, people thought—'

'Once, Mr. Cassilis, I myself thought—I cannot tell you what I thought Victoria Pengelley might be to me. But that is over long since.'

'One for her,' thought Lawrence, whose nerves were steady in danger. His two listeners trembled and shook, but from different causes.

'Over long since,' repeated Gabriel Cassilis. 'There was nothing in it, then?'

'We were two persons entirely dissimilar in disposition, Mr. Cassilis,' Lawrence replied evasively.

'Perhaps I was not worthy of her—her calm clear judgment.'

'Another for her,' he thought, with a chuckle. The situation would have pleased him but that he felt sorry for the poor man.

'Victoria is outwardly cold, yet capable of the deepest emotions. It is on her account, Colquhoun, that I come here. Foolish gossip has been at work, connecting your names. I think the best thing, without saying anything to Victoria, who must never suspect—'

'Never suspect,' echoed Colquhoun.

'That I ever heard this absurdity. But we must guard her from calumny, Colquhoun. Cæsar's wife, you know; and—and—I think that, perhaps, if you were to be a little less frequent in your calls—and—'

'I quite understand, Mr. Cassilis; and I am not in the least offended. I assure you most sincerely—I wish Mrs. Cassilis were here to listen—that I am deeply sorry for having innocently put you to the pain of saying this. However, the world shall have no further cause of gossip.'

No motion or sign from the dark corner where the hiding woman crouched.

Mr. Cassilis rose and tapped his knuckles with

his glasses. 'Thank you, Colquhoun. It is good of you to take this most unusual request so kindly. With such a wife as mine jealousy would be absurd. But I have to keep her name from even a breath—even a breath.'

'Quite right, Mr. Cassilis.'

He looked now round the room.

'Snug quarters for a bachelor—ah, I lived in lodgings always myself. I thought I heard a woman's voice as I came up-stairs.'

'From Sir Richard de Counterpane's rooms down stairs, perhaps. His nurses, I suppose. The poor old man is getting infirm.'

'Ay—ay; and your bedroom is there, I suppose?'

Lawrence took the lamp and opened the door. It was a bare badly-furnished room, with a little camp-bedstead, and nothing else, hardly. For Lawrence kept his luxurious habits for the day.

Was it pure curiosity that made Gabriel Cassilis look all round the room?

'Ah, hermit-like. Now, I like a large bed. However, I am very glad I came. One word, Colquhoun, is better than a thousand letters; and you are sure you do not misunderstand me?'

'Quite,' said Lawrence, taking his hat. 'I am going out too.'

'No jealousy at all,' said Gabriel Cassilis, going down the stairs.

'Certainly not.'

'Nothing but a desire to—to—'

'I understand perfectly,' said Lawrence.

As they descended, Lawrence heard steps on the stairs behind them. They were not yet, then, out of danger.

'Very odd,' said Mr. Cassilis. 'Coming up I heard a woman's voice. Now it seems as if there were a woman's feet.'

'Nerves, perhaps,' said Colquhoun. The steps above them stopped. 'I hear nothing.'

'Nor do I. Nerves—ah, yes—nerves.'

Mr. Cassilis turned to the left, Colquhoun with him. Behind them he saw the cloaked and hooded figure of Victoria Cassilis. At the Burlington-gardens end a cab was waiting. Near the horse's head stood a woman's figure which Lawrence thought he knew. As they passed her this woman, whoever she was, covered her face with a handkerchief. And at the same moment the cab drove by rapidly. Gabriel Cassilis saw neither woman nor cab. He was too happy to notice anything. There was nothing in it; nothing at all except mischievous gossip. And he had laid the Ghost.

'Dear me!' he said to himself presently, 'I forgot to ask about the Secret. But of course there is none. How should there be?'

Next morning there came another letter.

'You have been fooled worse than ever,' it said. 'Your wife was in Mr. Colquhoun's chambers the whole time that you were there. She came down the stairs after you; she passed through the gate, almost touching you, and she drove past you in a hansom cab. *I know the number*, and will give it to you when the time comes. Mr. Colquhoun lied to you. How long? How long?'

It should have been a busy day in the City. To begin with, it only wanted four days to settling-day. Telegrams and letters poured in, and they lay unopened on the desk at which Gabriel Cassilis sat, with this letter before him, mad with jealousy and rage.

CHAPTER VII.

'"Come now," the Master Builder cried,
"The twenty years of work are done;
Flaunt forth the Flag, and crown with pride
The Glory of the Coping-stone."'

Jack Dunquerque was to 'slack off' his visits to Twickenham. That is to say, as he interpreted the injunction, he was not wholly to discontinue them, in order not to excite suspicion. But he was not to haunt the house; he was to make less frequent voyages up the silver Thames; he was not to ride in leafy lanes side by side with Phillis—without having Phillis by his side he cared little about leafy lanes, and would rather be at the club; further, by these absences he was to leave off being necessary to the brightness of her life.

It was a hard saying. Nevertheless the young man felt that he had little reason for complaint. Other fellows he knew, going after other heiresses, had been quite peremptorily sent about their business for good, particularly needy young men like himself. All that Colquhoun extorted of him was

that he should 'slack off.' He felt, in a manner, grateful, although had he been a youth of quicker perception, he would have remembered that the lover who 'slacks off' can be no other than the lover who wishes he had not begun. But nobody ever called Jack a clever young man.

He was not to give her up altogether. He was not even to give up hoping. He was to have his chance with the rest. But he was warned that no chance was to be open to him until the young lady should enter upon her first season.

Not to give up seeing her. That was everything. Jack Dunquerque had hitherto lived the life of all young men, careless and *insouciant*, with its little round of daily pleasures. He was only different from other young men that he had learned, partly from a sympathetic nature and partly by travel, not to put all his pleasure in that life about town and in country houses which seems to so many the one thing which the world has to offer. He who has lived out on the Prairies for weeks has found that there are other pleasures besides the gas-light joys of Town. But his life had been without thought and purposeless—a very chaos of a life. And now he felt vaguely that his whole being was changed. To be with Phillis day after day, to listen to the

outpourings of her freshness and innocence, brought to him the same sort of refreshment as sitting under the little cataract of a mountain stream brings to one who rambles in a hot West Indian island. Things for which he once cared greatly he now cared for no more; the club-life, the cards, and the billiards ceased to interest him; he took no delight in them. Perhaps it was a proof of a certain weakness of nature in Jack Dunquerque that he could not at the same time love things in which Phillis took no part and the things which made the simple pleasures of her every-day life.

He might have been weak, and yet, whether he was weak or strong, he knew that she leaned upon him. He was so sympathetic; he seemed to know so much; he decided so quickly; he was in his way so masterful, that the girl looked up to him as a paragon of wisdom and strength.

I think she will always so regard him, because the knowledge of her respect raises Jack daily in moral and spiritual strength, and so her hero approaches daily to her ideal. What is the highest love worth if it have not the power of lifting man and woman together up to the higher levels, where the air is purer, the sunshine brighter, the vision clearer?

But Colquhoun's commands had wrought a fur-

ther change in him; that ugly good-looking face of his, which Agatha L'Estrange admired so much, and which was wont to be wreathed with a multitudinous smile, was now doleful. To the world of mankind—male mankind—the chief charm of Jack Dunquerque, the main cause of his popularity—his unvarying cheerfulness—was vanished.

'You ought to be called Doleful Jack,' said Ladds. 'Jack of the Rueful Countenance.'

'You don't know, Tommy,' replied the lover, sorrowfully wagging his head. 'I've seen Colquhoun; and he won't have it. Says I must wait.'

'He's waited till forty. I've waited to five-and-thirty, and we're both pretty jolly. Come, young un, you may take courage by our examples.'

'You never met Phil when you were five-and-twenty,' said Jack. 'Nobody ever saw a girl like Phillis.'

Five-and-thirty seems so great an age to five-and-twenty. And at five-and-thirty one feels so young, that it comes upon the possessor of so many years like a shock of cold water to be reminded that he is really no longer young.

One good thing—Lawrence Colquhoun did not reproach him. Partly perhaps because, as a guardian, he did not thoroughly realise Jack's flagitious con-

duct; partly because he was an easy-going man, with a notion in his head that he had nothing to do with the work of Duennas and Keepers of the Gynæceum. He treated the confessions of the remorseful lover with a cheery contempt—passed them by; no great harm had been done; and the girl was but a child.

His own conscience it was which bullied Jack so tremendously. One day he rounded on his accuser like the poor worm in the proverb, who might perhaps have got safe back to its hole but for that ill-advised turning. He met the charges like a man. He pleaded that, criminal as he had been, nefarious and inexcusable as his action was, this action had given him a very high time; and that, if it was all to do over again, he should probably alter his conduct only in degree, but not in kind; that is to say, he would see Phillis oftener and stay with her longer. Conscience knocked him out of time in a couple of rounds; but still he did have the satisfaction of showing fight.

Of course he would do the same thing again. There has never been found by duenna, by guardian, by despotic parent, or by interested relation, any law of restraint strong enough to keep apart two young people of the opposite sex and like age, after they have once become attracted towards each other.

Prudence and prudery, jealousy and interest, never have much chance. The ancient dames of duenna-dom may purse their withered lips and wrinkle their crow's-footed eyes; Love, the unconquered, laughs and conquers again.

It is of no use to repeat long explanations about Phillis. Such as she was, we know her—a law unto herself; careless of prohibitions and unsuspicious of danger. Like Una she wandered unprotected and fearless among whatever two-legged wolves, bears, eagles, lions, vultures, and other beasts and birds of prey might be anxiously waiting to snap her up. Jack was the great-hearted lion who was to bear her safely through the wistful growls of the meaner beasts. The lion is not clever like the fox or the beaver, but one always conceives of him as a gentleman, and therefore fit to be intrusted with such a beautiful maiden as Una or Phillis. And if Jack was quietly allowed to carry off his treasure it was Agatha L'Estrange who was chiefly to blame; and she, falling in love with Jack herself, quite in a motherly way, allowed the wooing to go on under her very nose. 'A bad, bad woman,' as Lawrence Colquhoun called her.

But such a wooing! Miss Ethel Citybredde, when she sees Amandus making a steady but not an

eagerly impetuous advance in her direction at a ball, feels her languid pulses beat a little faster. 'He is coming after Me,' she says to herself, with pride. They snatch a few moments to sit together in a conservatory. He offers no remark worthy of repetition, nor does she; yet she thinks to herself, 'He is going to ask me to marry him; he will kiss me; there will be a grand wedding; everybody will be pleased; other girls will be envious; and I shall be delighted. Papa knows that he is well off and well connected. How charming!'

Now Phillis allowed her lover to woo her without one thought of love or marriage, of which, indeed, she knew nothing. But if the passion was all on one side, the affection was equally divided. And when Jack truly said that Phillis did not love him, he forgot that she had given him already all that she knew of love; in that her thoughts, which on her first emancipation leaped forth, bounding and running in all directions with a wild yearning to behold the Great Unknown, were now returning to herself, and mostly flowed steadily, like streams of electric influence, in the direction of Jack; inasmuch as she referred unconsciously everything to Jack, as she dressed for him, drew for him, pored diligently over hated reading-books for him, and told him all her thoughts.

I have not told, nor can tell, of the many walks and talks these two young people had together. Day after day Jack's boat—that comfortable old tub, in which he could, and often did, cut a crab without spilling the contents into the river—lay moored off Agatha's lawn, or rolled slowly up and down the river, Jack rowing, while Phillis steered, sang, talked, and laughed. This was pleasant in the morning; but it was far more pleasant in the evening, when the river was so quiet, so still, and so black, and when thoughts crowded into the girl's brain, which fled like spirits when she tried to put them into words.

Or they rode together along the leafy roads through Richmond Park, and down by that unknown region far away from the world, where heron rise up from the water's edge, where the wild fowl fly above the lake in figures which remind one of Euclid's definitions, and the deer collect in herds among great ferns half as high as themselves. There they would let the horses walk, while Phillis, with the slender curving lines of her figure, her dainty dress which fitted it so well, and her sweet face, made the heart of her lover hungry; and when she turned to speak to him, and he saw in the clear depths of her eyes his own face reflected, his passion grew almost too much for him to bear.

A delicate dainty maiden, who was yet of strong and healthy *physique;* one who did not disdain to own a love for cake and strawberries, cream and ices, and other pleasant things; who had no young-ladyish affectations; who took life eagerly, not languidly. And not a coward, as many maidens boast to be: she ruled her horse with rein as firm as Jack Dunquerque, and sat him as steadily; she clenched her little fingers and set her lips hard when she heard a tale of wrong; her eyes lit up and her bosom heaved when she heard of heroic gest; she was strong to endure and to do. Not every girl would, as Phillis did, rise in the morning at five to train her untaught eyes and hand over those little symbols by which we read and write; not every girl would patiently begin at nineteen the mechanical drudgery of the music-lesson. And she did this in confidence, because Jack asked her every day about her lessons, and Agatha L'Estrange was pleased.

The emotion which is the next after, and worse than that of, love is sympathy. Phillis passed through the stages of curiosity and knowledge before she arrived at the stage of sympathy. Perhaps she was not far from the highest stage of all.

She learned something every day, and told Jack what it was. Sometimes it was an increase in her

knowledge of evil. Jack, who was by no means so clever as his biographer, thought that a pity. His idea was the common one—that a maiden should be kept innocent of the knowledge of evil. I think Jack took a prejudiced, even a Philistine, view of the case. He put himself on the same level as the Frenchman who keeps his daughter out of mischief by locking her up in a convent. It is not the knowledge of evil that hurts, any more than the knowledge of blackbeetles, earwigs, slugs, and other crawling things; the pure in spirit cast it off, just as the gardener who digs and delves among his plants washes his hands and is clean. The thing that hurts is the suspicion and constant thought of evil; the loveliest and most divine creature in the world is she who neither commits any ill nor thinks any, nor suspects others of ill—who has a perfect pity for backsliders, and a perfect trust in the people around her. Unfortunate it is that experience of life turns pity into anger, and trust into hesitation.

Or they would be out upon Agatha's lawn, playing croquet, to which that good lady still adhered, or lawn-tennis, which she tolerated. There would be the curate—he had abandoned that design of getting up *all* about Laud, but was madly, ecclesiastically madly, in love with Phillis; there would be

occasionally Ladds, who, in his heavy kindly way, pleased this young May Queen. Besides, Ladds was fond of Jack. There would be Gilead Beck in the straightest of frock-coats, and on the most careful behaviour; there would be also two or three young ladies, compared with whom Phillis was as Rosalind at the court of her uncle, or as Esther among the damsels of the Persian king's seraglio, so fresh and so incomparably fair.

'Mrs. L'Estrange,' Jack whispered one day, 'I am going to say a rude thing. Did you pick out the other girls on purpose to set off Phillis?'

'What a shame, Jack!' said Agatha, who, like the rest of the world, called him by what was not his Christian name. 'The girls are very nice—not so pretty as Phillis, but good-looking, all of them. I call them as pretty a set of girls as you would be likely to see on any lawn this season.'

'Yes,' said Jack; 'only, you see, they are all alike, and Phillis is different.'

That was it—Phillis was different. The girls were graceful, pleasant, and well bred. But Phillis was all this, and more. The others followed the beaten track, in which the strength of life is subdued and its intensity forbidden. Phillis was in earnest about everything, quietly in earnest; not

openly bent on enjoyment like the young ladies who run down Greenwich Hill, for instance, but in her way making others feel something of what she felt herself. Her intensity was visible in the eager face, the mobile flashes of her sensitive lips, and her brightening eyes. And, most unlike her neighbours, she even forgot her own dress, much as she loved the theory and practice of dress, when once she was interested, and was careless about theirs.

It was not pleasant for the minor stars. They felt in a vague uncomfortable way that Phillis was far more attractive; they said to each other that she was strange; one who pretended to know more French than the others said that she was *farouche*.

She was not in the least *farouche*, and the young lady her calumniator did not understand the adjective; but *farouche* she continued to be among the maidens of Twickenham and Richmond.

Jack Dunquerque heard the epithet applied on one occasion, and burst out laughing.

Phillis *farouche!* Phillis, without fear and without suspicion!

But then they do teach French so badly at girls' schools. And so poor Phillis remained ticketed with the adjective which least of any belonged to her.

A pleasant six weeks from April to June, while

the late spring blossomed and flowered into summer; a time to remember all his life afterwards with the saddened joy which, despite Dante's observation, does still belong to the memory of past pleasures.

But every pleasant time passes, and the six weeks were over.

Jack was to 'slack off.' The phrase struck him, applied to himself and Phillis, as simply in bad taste; but the meaning was plain. He was to present himself at Twickenham with less frequency.

Accordingly he began well by going there the very next day. Every new *régime* has to be commenced somehow, and Jack began his at once. He pulled up in his tub. It was a cloudy and windy day; drops of rain fell from time to time; the river was swept by sudden gusts which came driving down the stream, marked by broad black patches; there were no other boats out, and Jack struggled upwards against the current: the exercise at least was a relief to the oppression of his thoughts.

What was he to do with himself after the 'slacking off' had begun—after that day, in fact? The visits might drop to twice a week, then once a week, and then? But surely Colquhoun would be satisfied with such a measure of self-denial. In the intervals —say from Saturday to Saturday—he could occupy

himself in thinking about her. He might write to her—would that be against the letter of the law? It was clearly against the spirit. And—another consideration—it was no use writing unless he wrote in printed characters, and in words of not more than two syllables. He thought of such a love-letter, and of Phillis gravely spelling it out word by word to Mrs. L'Estrange. For poor Phillis had not as yet accustomed herself to look on the printed page as a vehicle for thought, although Agatha read to her every day. She regarded it as the means of conveying to the reader facts such as the elementary reading-book delights to set forth; so dry that the adult reader, if a woman, presently feels the dust in her eyes, and if a man is fain to get up and call wildly for quarts of bitter beer. No; Phillis was not yet educated up to the reception of a letter.

He would, he thought, sit in the least-frequented room of his club—the drawing-room—and with a book of some kind before him, just for a pretence, would pass the leaden hours in thinking of Phillis's perfections. Heavens! when was there a moment, by day or by night, that he did not think of them?

Bump! It was the bow of his ship, which knew by experience very well when to stop, and grounded

herself, without any conscious volition on his part, at the accustomed spot.

Jack jumped out, and fastened the painter to the tree where Phillis had once tied him. Then he strode across the lawns and flower-beds, and made for the little morning-room, where he hoped to find the ladies.

He found one of them. Fortune sometimes favours lovers. It was the younger one—Phillis herself.

She was bending over her work with brush and colour-box, looking as serious as if all her future depended on the success of that particular picture; beside her, tossed contemptuously aside, lay the much-despised Lesson-Book in Reading; for she had done her daily task. She did not hear Jack step in at the open window, and went on with her painting.

She wore a dress made of that stuff which looks like brown holland till you come close to it, and then you think it is silk, but are not quite certain, and I believe they call it Indian tussore. Round her dainty waist was a leathern belt set in silver with a châtelaine, like a small armoury of deadly weapons; and for colour she had a crimson ribbon about her neck. To show that the ribbon was not entirely meant for vanity, but had its uses, Phillis had slung

upon it a cross of Maltese silver-work, which I fear Jack had given her himself. And below the cross, where her rounded figure showed it off, she had placed a little bunch of sweet peas. Such a dainty damsel! Not content with the flower in her dress, she had stuck a white jasmine-blossom in her hair. All these things Jack noted with speechless admiration.

Then she began to sing in a low voice, all to herself, a little French ballad which Mrs. L'Estrange had taught her—one of the sweet old French songs.

She was painting in the other window, at a table drawn up to face it. The curtains were partly pulled together, and the blind was half drawn down, so that she sat in a subdued light, in which only her face was lit up, like the faces in a certain kind of photograph, while her hair and figure lay in shadow. The hangings were of some light-rose hue, which tinted the whole room, and threw a warm colouring over the old-fashioned furniture, the pictures, the books, the flowers on the tables, and the ferns in their glasses. Mrs. L'Estrange was no follower after the new school. Neutral tints had small charms for her; she liked the warmth and glow of the older fashion in which she had been brought up.

It looked to Jack Dunquerque like some shrine dedicated to peace and love, with Phillis for its priestess—or even its goddess. Outside the skies were gray; the wind swept down the river with driving rain; here was warmth, colour, and brightness. So he stood still and watched.

And as he waited an overwhelming passion of love seized him. If the world was well lost for Antony when he threw it all away for a queen no longer young, and the mother of one son at least almost grown up, what would it have been had his Cleopatra welcomed him in all the splendour of her white Greek beauty at sweet seventeen? There was no world to be lost for this obscure cadet of a noble house, but all the world to be won. His world was before his eyes; it was an unconscious maid, ignorant of her own surpassing worth and of the power of her beauty. To win her was to be the lord of all the world he cared for.

Presently she laid down her brush, and raised her head. Then she pushed aside the curtains, and looked out upon the gardens. The rain drove against the windows, and the wind beat about the branches of the lilacs on the lawn. She shivered, and pulled the curtains together again.

'I wish Jack were here,' she said to herself.

'He is here, Phil,' Jack replied.

She looked round, and darted across the room, catching him by both hands.

'Jack! O, I am glad! There is nobody at home. Agatha has gone up to town, and I am quite alone. What shall we do this afternoon?'

Clearly the right thing for him to propose was that he should instantly leave the young lady, and row himself back to Richmond. This, however, was not what he did propose. On the contrary, he kept Phillis's hands in his, and held them tight, looking in her upturned face, where he saw nothing but undisguised joy at his appearance.

'Shall we talk? Shall I play to you? Shall I draw you a picture? What shall we do, Jack?'

'Well, Phil, I think—perhaps—we had better talk.'

Something in his voice struck her; she looked at him sharply.

'What has happened, Jack? You do not look happy.'

'Nothing, Phil—nothing but what I might have expected.' But he looked so dismal that it was quite certain he had not expected it.

'Tell me, Jack.'

He shook his head.

'Jack, what *is* the good of being friends if you won't tell me what makes you unhappy?'

'I don't know how to tell you, Phil. I don't see a way to begin.'

'Sit down, and begin somehow.' She placed him comfortably in the largest chair in the room, and then she stood in front of him, and looked in his face with compassionate eyes. The sight of those deep-brown orbs, so full of light and pity, smote her lover with a kind of madness. 'What is it makes people unhappy? Are you ill?'

He shook his head, and laughed.

'No, Phil; I am never ill. You see, I am not exactly unhappy—'

'But, Jack, you look so dismal.'

'Yes, that is it; I am a little dismal. No, Phil —no. I am really unhappy, and you are the cause.'

'I the cause? But, Jack, why?'

'I had a talk with your guardian, Lawrence Colquhoun, yesterday. It was all about you. And he wants me—not to come here so often, in fact. And I mustn't come.'

'But why not? What does Lawrence mean?'

'That is just what I cannot explain to you. You must try to forgive me.'

'Forgive you, Jack?'

'You see, Phil, I have behaved badly from the beginning. I ought not to have called upon you as I did in Carnarvon-square; I ought not to have let you call me Jack, nor should I have called you Phil. It is altogether improper in the eyes of the world.'

She was silent for a while.

'Perhaps I have known, Jack, that it was a little unusual. Other girls haven't got a Jack Dunquerque, have they? Poor things! That is all you mean, isn't it, Jack?'

'Phil, don't look at me like that! You don't know—you can't understand— No; it is more than unusual; it is quite wrong.'

'I have done nothing wrong,' the girl said proudly. 'If I had, my conscience would make me unhappy. But I do begin to understand what you mean. Last week Agatha asked me if I was not thinking too much about you. And the curate made me laugh because he said, quite by himself in a corner, you know, that Mr. Dunquerque was a happy man; and when I asked him why, he turned very red, and said it was because I had given to him what all the world would long to have. He meant, Jack—'

'I wish he was here,' Jack cried hotly, 'for me to wring his neck!'

'And one day Laura Herries—'

'That's the girl who said you were *farouche*, Phil. Go on.'

'Was talking to Agatha about some young lady who had got compromised by a gentleman's attentions. I asked why, and she replied quite sharply that if I did not know, no one could know. Then she got up and went away. Agatha was angry about it, I could see; but she only said something about understanding when I come out.'

'Miss Herries ought to have her neck wrung too, as well as the curate,' said Jack.

'Compromise—improper.' Phil beat her little foot on the floor. 'What does it all mean? Jack, tell me—what is this wrong thing that you and I have done?'

'Not you, Phil; a thousand times not you.'

'Then I do not care much what other people say,' she replied simply. 'Do you know, Jack, it seems to me as if we never ought to care for what people, besides people we love, say about us.'

'But it is I who have done wrong,' said Jack.

'Have you, Jack? O, then I forgive you. I think I know now. You should have come to me with an unreal smile on your face, and pretended the

greatest deference to my opinion, even when you knew it wasn't worth having. That is what the curate does to young ladies. I saw him yesterday taking Miss Herries's opinion on Holman Hunt's picture. She said it was "sweetly pretty." He said, "Do you really think so?" in such a solemn voice, as if he wasn't quite sure that the phrase summed up the whole picture, but was going to think it over quietly. Don't laugh, Jack, because I cannot read like other people, and all I have to go by is what Mr. Dyson told me, and Agatha tells me, and what I see —and—and what you tell me, Jack, which is worth all the rest to me.'

The tears came into her eyes, but only for a moment, and she brushed them aside.

'And I forgive you, Jack, all the more because you did not treat me as you would have treated the girls who seem to me so lifeless and languid, and—Jack, it may be wrong to say it, but O, so small. What compliment could you have paid me better than to single me out for your friend—you who have seen so much and done so much—my friend, mine? We were friends from the first, were we not? And I have never since hidden anything from you, Jack, and never will.'

He kept it down still, this mighty yearning that

filled his heart, but he could not bear to look her in the face. Every word that she said stabbed him like a knife, because it showed her childish innocence and her utter unconsciousness of what her words might mean.

And then she laid her little hand in his.

'And now you have compromised me, as they would say? What does it matter, Jack? We can go on always just the same as we have been doing, can we not?'

He shook his head and answered huskily:

'No, Phil. Your guardian will not allow it. You must obey him. He says that I am to come here less frequently; that I must not do you—he is quite right, Phil—any more mischief; and that you are to have your first season in London without any ties or entanglements.'

'My guardian leaves me alone here with Agatha. It is you who have been my real guardian, Jack. I shall do what you tell me to do.'

'I want to do what is best for you, Phil—but—Child'—he caught her by the hands, and she half fell, half knelt at his feet, and looked up in his eyes with her face full of trouble and emotion—'child, must I tell you? Could not Agatha L'Estrange tell you that there is something in the world very different

from friendship? Is it left for me to teach you? They call it Love, Phil.'

He whispered the last words.

'Love? But I know all about it, Jack.'

'No, Phil, you know nothing. It isn't the love that you bear to Agatha that I mean.'

'Is it the love I have for you, Jack?' she asked in all innocence.

'It may be, Phil. Tell me only'—he was reckless now, and spoke fast and fiercely—'tell me if you love me as I love you. Try to tell me. I love you so much that I cannot sleep for thinking of you; and I think of you all day long. It seems as if my life must have been a long blank before I saw you; all my happiness is to be with you; to think of going on without you maddens me.'

'Poor Jack!' she said softly. She did not offer to withdraw her hands, but let them lie in his warm and tender grasp.

'My dear, my darling—my queen and pearl of girls—who can help loving you? And even to be with you, to have you close to me, to hold your hands in mine—that isn't enough.'

'What more—O Jack, Jack! what more?'

She began to tremble, and she tried to take back her hands. He let them go, but before she could

change her position he bent down, threw his arms about her, and held her face close to his while he kissed it a thousand times.

'What more? My darling, my angel, this—and this! Phil, Phil, wake at last from your long childhood; leave the Garden of Eden where you have wandered so many years, and come out into the other world—the world of love. My dear, my dear, can you love me a little, only a little, in return? We are all so different from what you thought us; you will find out some day that I am not clever and good at all; that I have only one thing to give you—my love. Phil, Phil, answer me—speak to me—forgive me!'

He let her go, for she tore herself from him and sprang to her feet, burying her face in her hands and sobbing aloud.

'Forgive me—forgive me!' It was all that he could say.

'Jack, what is it? what does it mean? O Jack'—she lifted her face and looked about her, with hands outstretched as one who feels in the darkness; her cheeks were white and her eyes wild—'what does it mean? what is it you have said? what is it you have done?'

'Phil!'

'Yes! Hush! don't speak to me—not yet, Jack. Wait a moment. My brain is full of strange thoughts'—she put out trembling hands before her, like one who wakes suddenly in a dream, and spoke with short quick breath. 'Something seems to have come upon me. Help me, Jack; O, help me! I am frightened.'

He took her in his arms and soothed and caressed her like a child, while she sobbed and cried.

'Look at me, Jack,' she said presently. 'Tell me, am I the same? Is there any change in me?'

'Yes, Phil; yes, my darling. You are changed. Your sweet eyes are full of tears, like the skies in April; and your cheeks are pale and white. Let me kiss them till they get their own colour again.'

He did kiss them, and she stood unresisting. But she trembled.

'I know, Jack, now,' she said softly. 'It all came upon me in a moment, when your lips touched mine. O Jack, Jack! it was as if something snapped; as if a veil fell from my eyes. I know now what you meant when you said just now that you loved me.'

'Do you, Phil? And can you love me too?'

'Yes, Jack. I will tell you when I am able to talk again. Let me sit down. Sit with me, Jack.'

She drew him beside her on the sofa and murmured low, while he held her hands.

'Do you like to sit just so, holding my hands? Are you better now, Jack?

'Do you think, Jack, that I can have always loved you—without knowing it at all—just as you love me? O my poor Jack!

'My heart beats so fast. And I am so happy. What have you said to me, Jack, that I should be so happy?

'See, the sun has come out—and the showers are over and gone—and the birds are singing—all the sweet birds—they are singing for me, Jack, for you and me—O, for you and for me!'

Her voice broke down again, and she hid her face upon her lover's shoulder, crying happy tears.

He called her a thousand endearing names; he told her that they would be always together; that she had made him the happiest man in all the world; that he loved her more than any girl ever had been loved in the history of mankind; that she was the crown and pearl and queen of all the women who ever lived; and then she looked up, smiling through her tears.

Ah, happy, happy day! Ah, day for ever to be remembered, even when, if ever, the years shall bring its fiftieth anniversary to an aged pair, whose children and grandchildren stand around their trembling feet! Ah, moments that live for ever in the memory of a life! They die, but are immortal. They perish all too quickly, but they bring forth the precious fruits of love and constancy, of trust, affection, good works, peace, and joy, which never perish.

'Take me on the river, Jack,' she said presently. 'I want to think it all over again, and try to understand it better.'

He fetched cushion and wrapper, for the boat was wet, and placed her tenderly in the boat. And then he began to pull gently up the stream.

The day had suddenly changed. The morning had been gloomy and dull, but the afternoon was bright; the strong wind was dropped for a light cool breeze; the swans were cruising about with their lordly pretence of not caring for things external; and the river ran clear and bright.

They were very silent now; the girl sat in her place, looking with full soft eyes on the wet and dripping branches or in the cool depths of the stream.

Presently they passed an old gentleman fishing in a punt; he was the same old gentleman whom Phillis saw one morning—now so long ago—when he had that little misfortune we have narrated, and tumbled backwards in his ark. He saw them coming, and adjusted his spectacles.

'Youth and Beauty again,' he murmured. 'And she's been crying. That young fellow has said something cruel to her. Wish I could break his head for him. The pretty creature! He'll come to a bad end, that young man.' Then he impaled an immense worm savagely and went on fishing.

A very foolish old gentleman this.

'I am trying to make it all out quite clearly, Jack,' Phillis presently began. 'And it is so difficult.' Her eyes were still bright with tears, but she did not tremble now, and the smile was back upon her lips.

'My darling, let it remain difficult. Only tell me now, if you can, that you love me.'

'Yes, Jack,' she said, not in the frank and childish unconsciousness of yesterday, but with the soft blush of a woman who is wooed. 'Yes, Jack, I know now that I do love you, as you love me, because my heart beat when you kissed me, and I felt all of a sudden that you were all the world to me.'

'Phil, I don't deserve it, I don't deserve you.'

'Not deserve me? O Jack, you make me feel humble when you say that! And I am so proud.

'So proud and so happy,' she went on, after a pause. 'And the girls who know all along—how do they find it out?—want every one for herself this great happiness too. I have heard them talk, and never understood till now. Poor girls! I wish they had their—their own Jack, not my Jack.'

Her lover had no words to reply.

'Poor boy! And you went about with your secret so long. Tell me how long, Jack?'

'Since the very first day I saw you in Carnarvon-square, Phil.'

'All that time? Did you love me on that day—not the first day of all, Jack? O, surely not the very first day?'

'Yes; not as I love you now—now that I know you so well, my Phillis—mine—but only then because you were so pretty.'

'Do men always fall in love with a girl because she is pretty?'

'Yes, Phil. They begin because she is pretty, and they love her more every day when she is so sweet and so good as my darling Phil.'

All this time Jack had been leaning on his oars,

and the boat was drifting slowly down the current. It was now close to the punt where the old gentleman sat watching them.

'They have made it up,' he said. 'That's right.' And he chuckled.

She looked dreamy and contented; the tears were gone out of her eyes, and a sweet softness lay there like the sunshine on a field of grass.

'She is a rose of Sharon and a lily of the valley,' said this old gentleman. 'That young fellow ought to be banished from the State for making other people envious of his luck. Looks a good-tempered rogue too.'

He observed with delight that they were thinking of each other while the boat drifted nearer to his punt. Presently—bump—bump!

Jack seized his sculls and looked up guiltily. The old gentleman was nodding and smiling to Phillis.

'Made it up?' he asked most impertinently. 'That is right, that is right. Give you joy, sir, give you joy. Wish you both happiness. Wish I had it to do all over again. God bless you, my dear!'

His jolly red face beamed like the setting sun under his big straw hat, and he wagged his head and laughed.

Jack laughed too; at other times he would have thought the old angler an extremely impertinent person. Now he only laughed.

Then he turned the boat's head, and rowed his bride swiftly homewards.

'Phil, I am like Jason bringing home Medea,' he said, with a faint reminiscence of classical tradition. I have explained that Jack was not clever.

'I hope not,' said Phil; 'Medea was a dreadful person.'

'Then Paris bringing home Helen— No, Phil; only your lover bringing home the sweetest girl that ever was. And worthy five-and-thirty Helens.'

When they landed Agatha L'Estrange was on the lawn waiting for them. To her surprise, Phillis on disembarking took Jack by the arm, and his hand closed over hers. Mrs. L'Estrange gasped. And in Phillis's tear-bright eyes she saw at last the light and glow of love; and in Phillis's blushing face she saw the happy pride of the celestial Venus who has met her only love.

'Children—children!' she said, 'what is this?'

Phillis made answer, in words which Abraham Dyson used to read to her from a certain Book, but which she never understood till now—made answer with her face upturned to her lover:

'I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me.'

They were a quiet party that evening. Jack did not want to talk. He asked Phillis to sing; he sat by in a sort of rapture while her voice, in the songs she most affected, whispered and sang to his soul not words, but suggestions of every innocent delight. She recovered something of her gaiety, but their usual laughter was hushed as if by some unexpressed thought. It will never come back to her again, that old mirth and light heart of childhood. She felt while she played as if she was in some great cathedral; the fancies of her brain built over her head a pile more mystic and wonderful than any she had seen. Its arches towered to the sky; its aisles led far away into dim space. She was walking slowly up the church, hand-in-hand with Jack, towards a great rose light in the east. An anthem of praise and thanksgiving echoed along the corridors, and pealed like thunder among the million rafters of the roof. Round them floated faces which looked and smiled. And she heard the voice of Abraham Dyson in her ear:

'Life should be twofold, not single. That, Phillis, is the great secret of the world. Every man is a priest; every woman is a priestess; it is a sacrament

which you have learned of Jack this day. Go on with him in faith and hope. Love is the Universal Church and Heaven is everywhere. Live in it; die in it; and dying begin your life of love again.'

'Phil,' cried Jack, 'what is it? You look as if you have seen a vision.'

'I have heard the voice of Abraham Dyson,' she said solemnly. 'He is satisfied and pleased with us, Jack.'

That was nothing to what followed, for presently there occurred a really wonderful thing.

On Phillis's table—they were all three sitting in the pleasant morning-room—lay among her lesson-books and drawing materials a portfolio. Jack turned it over carelessly. There was nothing at all in it except a single sheet of white paper, partly written over. But there had been other sheets, and these were torn off.

'It is an old book full of writing,' said Phillis carelessly. 'I have torn out all the leaves to make rough sketches at the back. There is only one left now.'

Jack took it up and read the scanty remnant.

'Good heavens!' he cried. 'Have you really destroyed all these pages, Phil?'

Then he laughed.

'What is it, Jack? Yes, I have torn them all out, drawn rough things on them, and then burnt them, every one.'

'Is it anything important?' asked Mrs. L'Estrange.

'I should think it was important,' said Jack. 'Ho, ho! Phillis has destroyed the whole of Mr. Dyson's lost chapter on the Coping-stone. And now his will is not worth the paper it is written on.'

It was actually so. Bit by bit, while Joseph Jagenal was leaving no corner unturned in the old house at Highgate in search of the precious document, without which Mr. Dyson's will was so much waste paper, this young lady was contentedly cutting out the sheets one by one, and using them up for her first unfinished groups. Of course she could not read one word of what was written. It was a fitting Nemesis to the old man's plans that they were frustrated through the very means by which he wished to regenerate the world.

And now nothing at all left but a tag end, a bit of the peroration, the last words of the final summing-up. And this was what Jack read aloud:

'. . . these provisions and no other. Thus will I have my College for the better Education of Women founded and maintained. Thus shall it grow and

develop till the land is full of the gracious influence of womankind at her best and noblest. The Coping-stone of a girl's Education should be, and must be, Love. When Phillis Fleming, my ward, whose example shall be taken as the model for my college, feels the passion of Love, her education is finally completed. She will have much afterwards to learn. But self-denial, sympathy, and faith come best through Love. Woman is born to be loved; that woman only approaches the higher state who has been wooed and who has loved. When Phillis loves, she will give herself without distrust and wholly to the man who wins her. It is my prayer, my last prayer for her, that he may be worthy of her.' Here Jack's voice faltered for a moment. 'Her education has occupied my whole thoughts for thirteen years. It has been the business of my later years. Now I send her out into the world prepared for all, except treachery, neglect, and ill-treatment. Perhaps her character would pass through these and come out the brighter. But we do not know; we cannot tell beforehand. Lord, lead her not into temptation; and so deal with her lover as he shall deal with her.'

'Amen,' said Agatha L'Estrange.

But Phillis sprang to her feet and threw up her arms.

'I have found it!' she cried. 'O, how often did he talk to me about the Coping-stone! Now I have nothing more to learn. O Jack, Jack!' she fell into his arms, and lay there as if it was her proper place. 'We have found the Coping-stone—you and I between us—and it is here, it is here!'

CHAPTER VIII.

'Tis well to be off with the old love,
Though you never get on with a new.'

During the two or three weeks following their success with Gilead Beck the Twins were conspicuous, had any one noticed them, for a recklessness of expenditure quite without parallel in their previous history. They plunged as regards hansoms, paying whatever was asked with an airy prodigality; they dined at the club every day, and drank champagne at all hours; they took half-guinea stalls at theatres; they went down to Greenwich and had fish-dinners; they appeared with new chains and rings; they even changed their regular hours of sleep, and sometimes passed the whole day broad awake, in the pursuit of youthful pleasures. They winked and nodded at each other in a way which suggested all kinds of delirious delights; and Cornelius even talked of adding an episode to the Epic, based on his own later experiences, which he would call, he said, the Jubilee of Joy.

The funds for this fling, all too short, were pro-

vided by their American patron. Gilead Beck had no objection to advance them something on account the young gentlemen found it so pleasant to spend money, that they quickly overcame scruples about asking for more; perhaps they would have gone on getting more, but for a word of caution spoken by Jack Dunquerque. In consequence of this unkindness they met each other one evening in the Studio with melancholy faces.

'I had a letter to-day from Mr. Gilead Beck,' said Cornelius to Humphrey.

'So had I,' said Humphrey to Cornelius.

'In answer to a note from me,' said Cornelius.

'In reply to a letter of mine,' said Humphrey.

'It is sometimes a little awkward, brother Humphrey,' Cornelius remarked, with a little temper, 'that our inclinations so often prompt us to do the same thing at the same time.'

Said Humphrey, 'I suppose then, Cornelius, that you asked him for money?'

'I did, Humphrey. How much has the Patron advanced you already on the great Picture?'

'Two hundred only. A mere trifle. And now he refuses to advance any more until the Picture is completed. Some enemy, some jealous brother artist must have corrupted his mind.'

*

'My case too. I asked for a simple fifty pounds. It is the end of May, and the country would be delightful if one could go there. I have already drawn four or five cheques of fifty each, on account of the Epic. He says, this mercenary and mechanical patron, that he will not lend me any more until the Poem is brought to him finished. Some carping critic has been talking to him.'

'How much of the Poem is finished?'

'How much of the Picture is done?'

The questions were asked simultaneously, but no answer was returned by either.

Then each sat for a few moments in gloomy silence.

'The end of May,' murmured Humphrey. 'We have to be ready by the beginning of October. June—July—only four months. My painting is designed for many hundreds of figures. Your poem for—how many lines, brother?'

'Twenty cantos of about five hundred lines each.'

'Twenty times five hundred is ten thousand.'

Then they relapsed into silence again.

'Brother Cornelius,' the Artist went on, 'this has been a most eventful year for us. We have been rudely disturbed from the artistic life of contemplation and patient work into which we had gradually

dropped. We have been hurried—hurried, I say, brother—into Action, perhaps prematurely—'

Cornelius grasped his brother's hand, but said nothing.

'You, Cornelius, have engaged yourself to be married.'

Cornelius dropped his brother's hand.

'Pardon me, Humphrey; it is you that is engaged to Phillis Fleming.'

'I am nothing of the sort, Cornelius,' the other returned sharply. 'I am astonished that you should make such a statement.'

'One of us certainly is engaged to the young lady. And as certainly it is not I. "Let your brother Humphrey hope," she said. Those were her very words. I do think, brother, that it is a little ungenerous, a little ungenerous of you, after all the trouble I took on your behalf, to try to force this young lady on me.'

Humphrey's cheek turned pallid. He plunged his hands into his silky beard, and walked up and down the room, gesticulating.

'I went down on purpose to tell Phillis about him. I spoke to her of his ardour. She said she appreciated—said she appreciated it, Cornelius. I even went so far as to say that you offered her a

virgin heart—perilling my own soul by those very words—a virgin heart'—he laughed melodramatically. 'And after that German milkmaid! Ha, ha! The Poet and the milkmaid!'

Cornelius by this time was red with anger. The brothers, alike in so many things, differed in this, that, when roused to passion, while Humphrey grew white, Cornelius grew crimson.

'And what did I do for you?' he cried out. The brothers were now on opposite sides of the table, walking backwards and forwards with agitated strides. 'I told her that you brought her a heart which had never beat for another—that, after your miserable little Roman model! An artist not able to resist the charms of his own model!'

'Cornelius!' cried Humphrey, suddenly stopping and bringing his fist with a bang upon the table.

'Humphrey!' cried his brother, exactly imitating his gesture.

Their faces glared into each other's: Cornelius, as usual, wrapped in his long dressing-gown, his shaven cheeks purple with passion; Humphrey in his loose velvet jacket, his white lips and cheeks, and his long silken beard trembling to every hair.

It was the first time the brothers had ever quarrelled in all their lives. And like a tempest on

Lake Windermere it sprang up without the slightest warning.

They glared in a steady way for a few minutes, and then drew back and renewed their quick and angry walk side by side, with the table between them.

'To bring up the old German business!' said Cornelius.

'To taunt me with the Roman girl!' said Humphrey.

'Will you keep your engagement like a gentleman, and marry the girl?' cried the Poet.

'Will you behave as a man of honour, and go to the altar with Phillis Fleming?' asked the Artist.

'I will not,' said Cornelius. 'Nothing shall induce me to get married.'

'Nor will I,' said Humphrey. 'I will see myself drawn and quartered first.'

'Then,' said Cornelius, 'go and break it to her yourself, for I will not.'

'Break what?' asked Humphrey passionately. 'Break her heart, when I tell her, if I must, that my brother repudiates his most sacred promises?'

Cornelius was touched. He relented. He softened.

'Can it be that she loves us both?'

They were at the end of the table, near the chairs, which as usual were side by side.

'Can that be so, Cornelius?'

They drew nearer the chairs; they sat down; they turned, by force of habit, lovingly towards each other; and their faces cleared.

'Brother Humphrey,' said Cornelius, 'I see that we have mismanaged this affair. It will be a wrench to the poor girl, but it will have to be done. I thought you *wanted* to marry her.'

'I thought *you* did.'

'And so we each pleaded the other's cause. And the poor girl loves us both. Good heavens! What a dreadful thing for her!'

'I remember nothing in fiction so startling. To be sure, there is some excuse for her.'

'But she can't marry us both.'

'N—n—no. I suppose not. No—certainly not. Heaven forbid! And as you will not marry her—'

Humphrey shook his head in a decided manner.

'And I will not—'

'Marry?' interrupted Humphrey. 'What! And give up this? Have to get up early; to take breakfast at nine; to be chained to work; to be inspected and interfered with while at work—Phillis drew me once, and pinned the portrait on my easel; to be

restricted in the matter of port; to have to go to bed at eleven; perhaps, Cornelius, to have babies; and beside, if they should be Twins! Fancy being shaken out of your poetic dream by the cries of Twins!'

'No sitting up at night with pipes and brandy-and-water,' echoed the Poet. 'And, Humphrey'—here he chuckled, and his face quite returned to its brotherly form—'should we go abroad, no flirting with Roman models—eh, eh, eh?'

'Ho, ho, ho!' laughed the Artist melodiously. 'And no carrying milk-pails up the Heidelberg hills—eh, eh, eh?'

'Marriage be hanged!' cried the Poet, starting up again. 'We will preserve our independence, Humphrey. We will be free to woo, but not to wed.'

Was there ever a more unprincipled Bard? It is sad to relate that the Artist echoed his brother.

'We will, Cornelius—we will. *Vive la liberté!*' He snapped his fingers, and began to sing:

'Quand on est à Paris
On écrit à son père,
Qui fait réponse, "Brigand,
Tu n'en as—"'

He broke short off, and clapped his hands like a schoolboy. 'We will go to Paris next week, brother.'

'We will, Humphrey, if we can get any more money. And now—how to get out of the mess?'

'Do you think Mrs. L'Estrange will interfere?'

'Or Colquhoun?'

'Or Joseph?'

'The best way would be to pretend it was all a mistake. Let us go to-morrow, and cry off as well as we can.'

'We will, Cornelius.'

The quarrel and its settlement made them thirsty, and they drank a whole potash-and-brandy each before proceeding with the interrupted conversation.

'Poor little Phillis!' said the Artist, filling his pipe. 'I hope she won't pine much.'

'Ariadne, you know,' said the Poet; and then he forgot what Ariadne did, and broke off short.

'It isn't our fault, after all. Men of genius are always run after. Women are made to love men, and men are made to break their hearts. Law of Nature, dear Cornelius—law of Nature. Perhaps the man is a fool who binds himself to one. Art alone should be our mistress—glorious Art!'

'Yes,' said Cornelius; 'you are quite right. And what about Mr. Gilead Beck?'

This was a delicate question, and the Artist's face grew grave.

'What are we to do, Cornelius?'

'I don't know, Humphrey.'

'Will the Poem be finished?'

'No. Will the Picture?'

'Not a chance.'

'Had we not better, Humphrey, considering all the circumstances, make up our minds to throw over the engagement.'

'Tell me, Cornelius—how much of your Poem remains to be done?'

'Well, you see, there is not much actually written.'

'Will you show it to me—what there is of it?'

'It is all in my head, Humphrey. Nothing is written.'

He blushed prettily as he made the confession. But the Artist met him half-way with a frank smile.

'It is curious, Cornelius, that up to the present I have not actually drawn any of the groups. My figures are still in my head.'

Both were surprised. Each, spending his own afternoons in sleep, had given the other credit for working during that part of the day. But they were too much accustomed to keep up appearances to make any remark upon this curious coincidence.

'Then, brother,' said the Poet, with a sigh of

relief, 'there really is not the slightest use in leading Mr. Beck to believe that the works will be finished by October, and we had better ask for a longer term. A year longer would do for me.'

'A year longer would, I think, do for me,' said Humphrey, stroking his beard, as if he was calculating how long each figure would take to put in. 'We will go and see Mr. Beck to-morrow.'

'Better not,' said the sagacious Poet.

'Why not?'

'He might ask for the money back.'

'True, brother. He must be capable of that meanness, or he would have given us that cheque we asked for. Very true. We will write.'

'What excuse shall we make?'

'We will state the exact truth, brother. No excuse need be invented. We will tell our Patron that Art cannot—must not—be forced.'

This settled, Cornelius declared that a weight was off his mind, which had oppressed him since the engagement with Mr. Beck was first entered into. Nothing, he said, so much obstructed the avenues of fancy, checked the flow of ideas, and destroyed grasp of language as a slavish time-engagement. Now, he went on to explain, he felt free; already his mind, like a garden in May, was blos-

soming in a thousand sweet flowers. Now he was at peace with mankind. Before this relief he had been—Humphrey would bear him out—inclined to lose his temper over trifles; and the feeling of thraldom caused him only that very evening to use harsh words even to his twin brother. Here he held out his hand, which Humphrey grasped with effusion.

They wrote their letters next day—not early in the day, because they prolonged their evening parliament till late, and it was one o'clock when they took breakfast. But they wrote the letters after breakfast, and at two they took the train to Twickenham.

Phillis received them in her morning-room. They appeared almost as nervous and agitated as when they called a week before. So shaky were their hands that Phillis began by prescribing for them a glass of wine each, which they took, and said they felt better.

'We come for a few words of serious explanation,' said the Poet.

'Yes,' said Phillis. 'Will Mrs. L'Estrange do?'

'On the contrary; it is with you that we would speak.'

'Very well,' she replied. 'Pray go on.'

They were sitting side by side on the sofa, looking as grave as a pair of owls. There was something Gog and Magogish, too, in their proximity.

Phillis found herself smiling when she looked at them. So, to prevent laughing in their very faces, she changed her place, and went to the open window.

'Now,' she said.

Cornelius, with the gravest face in the world, began again.

'It is a delicate and, I fear, a painful business,' he said. 'Miss Fleming, you doubtless remember a conversation I had with you last week on your lawn.'

'Certainly. You told me that your brother, Mr. Humphrey, adored me. You also said that he brought me a virgin heart. I remember perfectly. I did not understand your meaning then. But I do now. I understand it now.' She spoke the last words with softened voice, because she was thinking of the Coping-stone and Jack Dunquerque.

Humphrey looked indignantly at his brother. Here was a position to be placed in! But Cornelius lifted his hand, with a gesture which meant 'Patience; I will see you through this affair,' and went on:

'You see, Miss Fleming, I was under a mistake. My brother, who has the highest respect, in the abstract, for womanhood, which is the incarnation and embodiment of all that is graceful and beautiful in this fair world of ours, does not—does not—after all—'

Phillis looked at Humphrey. He sat by his brother, trembling with a mixture of shame and terror. They were not brave men, these Twins, and they certainly drank habitually more than is good for the nervous system.

She began to laugh, not loudly, but with a little ripple of mirth which terrified them both, because in their vanity they thought it the first symptoms of hysterical grief. Then she stepped to the sofa, and placed both her hands on the unfortunate Artist's shoulder.

He thought that she was going to shake him, and his soul sank into his boots.

'You mean that he does not, after all, adore me. O Mr. Humphrey, Mr. Humphrey, was it for this that you offered me a virgin heart? Is this your gratitude to me for drawing your likeness when you were hard at work in the Studio? What shall I say to your brother Joseph, and what will he say to you?'

'My dear young lady,' Cornelius interposed hastily, 'there is not the slightest reason to bring Joseph into the business at all. He must not be told of this most unfortunate mistake. Humphrey does adore you—speak, brother—do you not adore Miss Fleming?'

Humphrey was gasping and panting.

'I do,' he ejaculated, 'I do—O, most certainly!'

Then Phillis left him and turned to his brother.

'But there is yourself, Mr. Cornelius. You are not an artist; you are a poet; you spend your days in the Workshop, where Jack Dunquerque and I found you rapt in so poetic a dream that your eyes were closed and your mouth open. If you made a mistake about Humphrey, it is impossible that he could have made a mistake about you.'

'This is terrible,' said Cornelius. 'Explain, brother Humphrey. Miss Fleming, we—no, you as well, are victims of a dreadful error.'

He wiped his brow and appealed to his brother.

Released from the terror of Phillis's hands upon his shoulder, the Artist recovered some of his courage and spoke. But his voice was faltering.

'I too,' he said, 'mistook the respectful admiration of my brother for something dearer. Miss Fleming, he is already wedded.'

'Wedded? Are you a married man, Mr. Cornelius? O, and where is the virgin heart?'

'Wedded to his art,' Humphrey explained. Then he went a little off his head, I suppose, in the excitement of this crisis, because he continued in broken words, 'Wedded—long ago—object of his life's love—with milk-pails on the hills of Heidelberg, and light blue eyes—the Muse of Song. But he regards you with respectful admiration.'

'Most respectful,' said Cornelius. 'As Petrarch regarded the wife of the Count de Sade. Will you forgive us, Miss Fleming, and—and—try to forget us?'

'So, gentlemen,' the young lady said, with sparkling eyes, 'you come to say that you would rather not marry me. I wonder if that is usual with men.'

'No, no!' they both cried together. 'Happy is the man—'

'You may be the happy man, Humphrey,' said Cornelius.

'No; you, brother—you.'

Never had wedlock seemed so dreadful a thing as it did now, with a possible bride standing before them, apparently only waiting for the groom to make up his mind.

'I will forgive you both,' she said; 'so go away happy. But I am afraid I shall never, never be able to forget you. And if I send you a sketch of yourselves just as you look now, so ashamed and so foolish, perhaps you will hang it up in the Workshop or the Studio, to be looked at when you are awake; that is, when you are not at work.'

They looked guiltily at each other and drew a little apart. It was the most cruel speech that Phillis had ever made; but she was a little angry with this vain and conceited pair of windbags.

'I shall not tell Mr. Joseph Jagenal, because he is a sensible man and would take it ill, I am sure. And I shall not tell my guardian Lawrence Colquhoun, because I do not know what he might say or do. And I shall not tell Mrs. L'Estrange; that is, I shall not tell her the whole of it, for your sakes. But I must tell Jack Dunquerque, because I am engaged to be married to Jack, and because I love him and must tell him everything.'

They cowered before her as they thought of the possible consequences of this information.

'You need not be frightened,' she went on; 'Jack will not call to see you and disturb you at your work.'

Her eyes, that began by dancing with fun, now

flashed indignation. It was not that she felt angry at what most girls would have regarded as a deliberate insult, but the unmanliness of the two filled her with contempt. They looked so small and so mean.

'Go,' she said, pointing to the door. 'I forgive you. But never again dare to offer a girl each other's virgin heart.'

They literally slunk away like a pair of beaten hounds. Then Phillis suddenly felt sorry for them as they crept out of the door, one after the other. She ran after them and called them back.

'Stop,' she cried; 'we must not part like that. Shake hands, Cornelius. Shake hands, Humphrey. Come back and take another glass of wine. Indeed you want it; you are shaking all over; come.'

She led them back, one in each hand, and poured out a glass of sherry for each.

'You could not have married me, you know,' she said, laughing, 'because I am going to marry Jack. There—forgive me for speaking unkindly, and we will remain friends.'

They took her hand, but they did not speak, and something like a tear stood in their eyes. When they left her Phillis observed that they did not take each other's arm as usual, but walked separate. And they looked older.

CHAPTER IX.

'What is it you see?
A nameless thing—a creeping snake in the grass.'

Who was the writer of the letters? They were all in one hand, and that a feigned hand.

Gabriel Cassilis sat with these anonymous accusations against his wife spread out upon the table before him. He compared one with another; he held them up to the light; he looked for chance indications which a careless moment might leave behind: there were none—not a stroke of the pen; not even the name of the shop where the paper was sold. They were all posted at the same place, but that was nothing.

The handwriting was large, upright, and perhaps designedly ill-formed; it appeared to be the writing of a woman, but of this Mr. Cassilis was not sure.

Always the same tale; always reference to a secret between Colquhoun and his wife. What was that secret?

In Colquhoun's room—alone with him—almost under his hand. But where? He went into the

bedroom, which was lighted by the gas of the court; an open room, furnished without curtains; there was certainly no one concealed, because concealment was impossible. And in the sitting-room—then he remembered that the room was dimly lighted; curtains kept out the gaslight of the court; Colquhoun had on his entrance lowered the silver lamp; there was a heavy green shade on this; it was possible that she might have been in the room while he was there, and listening to every word.

The thought was maddening. He tried to put it all before himself in logical sequence, but could not; he tried to fence with the question, but it would not be evaded; he tried to persuade himself that suspicions resting on an anonymous slander were baseless, but every time his mind fell back upon the voice which proclaimed his wife's dishonour.

A man on the rack might as well try to dream of soft beds and luxurious dreamless sleep; a man being flogged at the cart-tail might as well try to transport his thoughts to boyhood's games upon a village green; a man at the stake might as well try to think of deep delicious draughts of ice-cold water from a shady brook. The agony and shame of the present are too much for any imagination.

It was so to Gabriel Cassilis. The one thing

which he trusted in, after all the villanies and rogueries he had learned during sixty-five years mostly spent among men trying to make money, was his wife's fidelity. It was like the Gospel—a thing to be accepted and acted upon with unquestioning belief. Good heavens! if a man cannot believe in his wife's honesty, in what is he to believe?

Gabriel Cassilis was not a violent man; he could not find relief in angry words and desperate deeds like a Moor of Venice; his jealousy was a smouldering fire; a flame which burned with a dull fierce heat; a disease which crept over body and mind alike, crushing energy, vitality, and life out of both.

Everything might go to ruin round him; he was no longer capable of thought or action. Telegrams and letters lay piled before him on the table, and he left them unopened.

Outside, his secretary was in dismay. His employer would receive no one, and would attend to nothing. He signed mechanically such papers as were brought him to sign, and then he motioned the secretary to the door.

This apathy lasted for four days—the four days most important of any in the lives of himself, of Gilead Beck, and of Lawrence Colquhoun. For the

fortunes of all hung upon his shaking it off, and he did not shake it off.

On the second day, the day when he got the letter telling him that his wife had been in Colquhoun's chambers while he was there, he sent for a private detective.

He put into his hands all the letters.

'Written by a woman,' said the officer. 'Have you any clue, sir?'

'None—none whatever. I want you to watch. You will watch my wife and you will watch Mr. Colquhoun. Get every movement watched, and report to me every morning. Can you do this? Good. Then go, and spare neither pains nor money.'

The next morning's report was unsatisfactory. Colquhoun had gone to the Park in the afternoon, dined at his club, and gone home to his chambers at eleven. Mrs. Cassilis, after dining at home, went out at ten, and returned early—at half-past eleven.

But there came a letter from the anonymous correspondent.

'You are having a watch set on them. Good. But that won't find out the Scotch secret. She *was* in his room while you were there—hidden somewhere, but I do not know where.'

He went home to watch his wife with his own eyes. He might as well have watched a marble statue. She met his eyes with the calm cold look to which he was accustomed. There was nothing in her manner to show that she was other than she had always been. He tried in her presence to realise the fact, if it was a fact. 'This woman,' he said to himself, 'has been lying hidden in Colquhoun's chambers listening while I talked to him. She was there before I went; she was there when I came away. What is her secret?'

What, indeed! She seemed a woman who could have no secrets; a woman whose life from her cradle might have been exposed to the whole world, who would have found nothing but cause of admiration and respect.

In her presence, under her influence, his jealousy lost something of its fierceness. He feared her too much to suspect her while in his sight. It was at night, in his office, away from her, that he gave full swing to the bitterness of his thoughts. In the hours when he should have been sleeping he paced his room, wrapped in his dressing-gown—a long lean figure, with eyes aflame, and thoughts that tore him asunder; and in the hours when he should have been waking he sat with bent shoulders, glowering

at the letters of her accuser, gazing into a future which seemed as black as ink.

His life, he knew, was drawing to its close. Yet a few more brief years, and the summons would come for him to cross the River. Of that he had no fear; but it was dreadful to think that his age was to be dishonoured. Success was his; the respect which men give to success was his; no one inquired very curiously into the means by which success was commanded; he was a name and a power. Now that name was to be tarnished; by no act of his own, by no fault of his: by the treachery of the only creature in the world, except his infant child, in whom he trusted.

He would have, perhaps, to face the publicity of an open court; to hear his wrongs set forth to a jury; to read his 'case' in the daily papers.

And he would have to alter his will.

Oddly enough, of all the evil things which seemed about to fall on him, not one troubled him more than the last.

His detective brought him no news on the next day. But his unknown correspondent did.

'She is tired,' the letter said, 'of not seeing Mr. Colquhoun for three whole days. She will see him to-morrow. There is to be a garden-party at Mrs.

L'Estrange's Twickenham villa. Mr. Colquhoun will be there, and she is going too to meet him. If you dared, if you had the heart of a mouse, you would be there too. You would arrive late; you would watch and see for yourself, unseen, if possible, how they meet, and what they say to each other. An invitation lies for you, as well as your wife, upon the table. Go!'

While he was reading this document his secretary came in, uncalled.

'The Eldorado Stock,' he said, in his usual whisper. 'Have you decided what to do? Settling-day on Friday. Have you forgotten what you hold, sir?'

'I have forgotten nothing,' Gabriel Cassilis replied. 'Eldorado Stock? I never forget anything. Leave me. I shall see no one to-day; no one is to be admitted. I am very busy.'

'I don't understand it,' the secretary said to himself. 'Has he got information that he keeps to himself? Has he got a deeper game on than I ever gave him credit for? What does it mean? Is he going off his head?'

More letters and more telegrams came. They were sent in to the inner office; but nothing came out of it.

That night Gabriel Cassilis left his chair at ten o'clock. He had eaten nothing all day. He was faint and weak; he took something at a City railway-station, and drove home in a cab. His wife was out.

In the hall he saw her woman, the tall woman with the unprepossessing face.

'You are Mrs. Cassilis's maid?' he asked.

'I am, sir.'

'Come with me.'

He took her to his own study, and sat down. Now he had the woman with him he did not know what to ask her.

'You called me, sir,' she said. 'Do you want to know anything?'

'How long have you been with your mistress?'

'I came to her when her former maid, Janet, died, sir. Janet was with her for many years before she married.'

'Janet—Janet—a Scotch name.'

'Janet was with my mistress in Scotland.'

'Yes—Mrs. Cassilis was in Scotland—yes. And—and—Janet was in your confidence.'

'We had no secrets from each other, sir. Janet told me everything.'

'What was there to tell?'

'Nothing, sir. What should there be?'

This was idle fencing.

'You may go,' he said. 'Stay. Let them send me up something—a cup of tea, a slice of meat—anything.'

Then he recommenced his dreary walk up and down the room.

Later on a curious feeling came over him—quite a strange and a novel feeling. It was as if, while he thought, or rather while his fancies like so many devils played riot in his brain, he could not find the right words in which to clothe his thoughts. He struggled against the feeling. He tried to talk. But the wrong words came from his lips. Then he took a book; yes—he could read. It was nonsense; he shook off the feeling. But he shrank from speaking to any servant, and went to bed.

That night he slept better, and in the morning was less agitated. He breakfasted in his study, and then he went down to his office.

It was the fourth day since he had opened no letters and attended to no business. He remembered this, and tried to shake off the gloomy fit. And then he thought of the coming *coup*, and tried to bring his thoughts back to their usual channel. How much did he hold of Eldorado Stock? Rising

higher day by day. But three days, three short days, before settling-day.

The largest stake he had ever ventured; a stake so large that when he thought of it his spirit and nerve came back to him.

For once—for the last time—he entered his office, holding himself erect, and looking brighter than he had done for days; and he sat down to his letters with an air of resolution.

Unfortunately the first letter was from the anonymous correspondent.

'She wrote to him to-day; she told him that she could bear her life no longer; she threatened to tell the secret right out; she will have an explanation with him to-morrow at Mrs. L'Estrange's. Do you go down, and you will hear the explanation. Be quiet, and be secret.'

He started from his chair, the letter in his hand, and looked straight before him. Was it, then, all true? Would that very day give him a chance of finding out the secret between Lawrence Colquhoun and his wife?

He put up his glasses and read the letter—the last of a long series, every one of which had been a fresh arrow in his heart—again and again.

Then he sat down and burst into tears.

A young man's tears may be forced from him by many a passing sorrow, but an old man's only by the reality of a sorrow which cannot be put aside. The deaths of those who are dear to the old man fall on him as so many reminders that his own time will soon arrive; but it is not for such things as death that he laments.

'I loved her,' moaned Gabriel Cassilis. 'I loved her, and I trusted her; and this the end!'

He did not curse her, nor Colquhoun, nor himself. It was all the hand of Fate. It was hard upon him, harder than he expected or knew, but he bore it in silence.

He sat so, still and quiet, a long while.

Then he put together all the letters, which the detective had brought back, and placed them in his pocket. Then he dallied and played with the paper and pencils before him, just as one who is restless and uncertain in his mind. Then he looked at his watch—it was past three; the garden-party was for four; and then he rose suddenly, put on his hat, and passed out. His secretary asked him, as he went through his office, if he would return, and at what time.

Mr. Cassilis made a motion with his hand, as if to put the matter off for a few moments, and replied

nothing. When he got into the street it occurred to him that he could not answer the secretary because that same curious feeling was upon him again, and he had lost the power of speech. It was strange, and he laughed. Then the power of speech as suddenly returned to him. He called a cab, and told the driver where to go. It is a long drive to Twickenham. He was absorbed in his thoughts, and as he sat back, gazing straight before him, the sensation of not being able to speak kept coming and going in his brain. This made him uneasy, but not much, because he had graver things to think about.

At half-past four he arrived within a few yards of Mrs. L'Estrange's house, where he alighted and dismissed his cab. The cabman touched his hat and said it was a fine day, and seasonable weather for the time of the year.

'Ay,' replied Gabriel Cassilis mechanically. 'A fine day, and seasonable weather for the time of the year.'

And as he walked along under the lime-trees he found himself saying over again, as if it was the burden of a song:

'A fine day, and seasonable weather for the time of the year.'

CHAPTER X.

'How green are you and fresh in this old world!'

On the morning of the garden-party Joseph Jagenal called on Lawrence Colquhoun.

'I have two or three things to say,' he began, 'if you can give me five minutes.'

'Twenty,' said Lawrence. 'Now then.'

He threw himself back in his easiest chair and prepared to listen.

'I am in the way of hearing things sometimes,' Joseph said. 'And I heard a good deal yesterday about Mr. Gabriel Cassilis.'

'What?' said Lawrence, aghast; 'he surely has not been telling all the world about it!'

'I think we are talking of different things,' Joseph answered after a pause. 'Don't tell me what *you* mean, but what I mean is that there is an uneasy feeling about Gabriel Cassilis.'

'Ay? In what way?'

'Well, they say he is strange; does not see people; does not open letters; and is evidently suffering from some mental distress.'

'Yes.'

'And when such a man as Gabriel Cassilis is in mental distress, money is at the bottom of it.'

'Generally. Not always.'

'It was against my advice that you invested any of your money by his direction.'

'I invested the whole of it; and all Phillis's too. Mr. Cassilis has the investment of our little all,' Lawrence added, laughing.

But the lawyer looked grave.

'Don't do it,' he said; 'get it in your own hands again; let it lie safely in the three per cents. What has a pigeon like you to do among the City hawks? And Miss Fleming's money too. Let it be put away safely, and give her what she wants, a modest and sufficient income without risk.'

'I believe you are right, Jagenal. In fact I am sure you are right. But Cassilis would have it. He talked me into an ambition for good investments which I never felt before. I will ask him to sell out for me, and go back to the old three per cents and railway shares—which is what I have been brought up to. On the other hand, you are quite wrong about his mental distress. That is—I happen to know—you are a lawyer and will not talk—it is not due to money matters; and Gabriel

Cassilis is, for what I know, as keen a hand as ever at piling up the dollars. The money is all safe; of that I am quite certain.'

'Well, if you think so— But don't let him keep it,' said Joseph the Doubter.

'After all, why not get eight and nine per cent if you can?'

'Because it isn't safe, and because you ought not to expect it. What do you want with more money than you have got? However, I have told you what men say. There is another thing. I am sorry to say that my brothers have made fools of themselves, and I am come to apologise for them.'

'Don't if it is disagreeable, my dear fellow.'

'It is not very disagreeable, and I would rather. They are fifty, but they are not wise. In fact they have lived so much out of the world that they do not understand things. And so they went down and proposed for the hand of your ward, Phillis Fleming.'

'O! Both of them? And did she accept?'

'The absurd thing is that I cannot discover which of them wished to be the bridegroom, nor which Phillis thought it was. She is quite confused about the whole matter. However, they went away and thought one of them was accepted, which ex-

plains a great deal of innuendo and reference to some unknown subject of mirth which I have observed lately. I say one of them, because I find it impossible to ascertain which of them was the man. Well, whether they were conscience-stricken or whether they repented I do not know, but they went back to Twickenham and solemnly repudiated the engagement.'

'And Phillis?'

'She laughs at them, of course. Do not fear; she wasn't in the least annoyed. I shall speak to my brothers this evening.'

Colquhoun thought of the small fragile-looking pair, and inwardly hoped that their brother would be gentle with them.

'And there is another thing, Colquhoun. Do you want to see your ward married?'

'To Jack Dunquerque?'

'Yes.'

'Not yet. I want her to have her little fling first. Why, the poor child is only just out of the nursery, and he wants to marry her off-hand—it's cruel. Let her see the world for a year, and then we will consider it. Jagenal, I wish I could marry the girl myself.'

'So do I,' said Joseph, with a sigh.

'I fell in love with her,' said Lawrence, 'at first sight. That is why,' he added, in his laziest tones, 'I suppose that is why I told Jack Dunquerque not to go there any more. But he has gone there again, and he has proposed to her, I hear, and she has accepted him. So that I can't marry her, and you can't, and we are a brace of fogies.'

'And what have you said to Mr. Dunquerque ?'

'I acted the jealous guardian, and I ordered him not to call on my ward any more for the present. I shall see how Phillis takes it, and give in, of course, if she makes a fuss. Then Beck has been here offering to hand over all his money to Jack, because he loves the young man.'

'Quixotic,' said the lawyer.

'Yes. The end of it will be a wedding, of course. You and I may shake a leg at it if we like. As for me, I never can marry any one ; and as for you—'

'As for me, I never thought of marrying her. I only remarked that I had fallen in love, as you say, with her. That's no matter to anybody.'

'Well, things go on as they like, not as we like. What nonsense it is to say that man is master of his fate ! Now what I should like would be to get rid of the reason that prevents my marrying ; to put

Jack Dunquerque into the water-butt and sit on the lid; and then for Phillis to fall in love with me. After that, strawberries and cream with a little champagne for the rest of my Methuselam-like career. And I can't get any of these things. Master of his fate!'

'Have you heard of the Coping-stone chapter? It is found.'

'Agatha told me something, in a disjointed way. What is the effect of it?'

Joseph laughed.

'It is all torn up but the last page. A righteous retribution, because if Phillis had been taught to read this would not have happened. Now I suspect the will must be set aside, and the money will mostly go to Gabriel Cassilis, the nearest of kin, who doesn't want it.'

CHAPTER XI.

'La langue des femmes est leur épée, et elles ne la laissent pas rouiller.'

The grounds of the house formed a parallelogram, of which the longer sides were parallel with the river. In the north-east corner stood the house itself, its front facing west. It was not a large house, as has been explained. A conservatory was built against nearly the whole length of the front. The lawns and flower-beds spread to west and south, sloping down to the river's edge. The opposite angle was occupied by stables, kitchen-garden, and boathouse. Gabriel Cassilis approached it from the east. An iron railing and a low hedge, along which were planted limes, laburnums, and lilacs, separated the place from the road. But before reaching the gate—in fact, at the corner of the kitchen-garden—he could, himself unseen, look through the trees and observe the party. They were all there. He saw Mrs. L'Estrange, Phillis, his own wife,—Heavens! how calm and cold she looked, and how beautiful he thought her!—with a half a dozen other ladies.

The men were few. There was the curate. He was dangling round Phillis, and wore an expression of holiness-out-for-a-holiday, which is always so charming in these young men. Gabriel Cassilis also noticed that he was casting eyes of longing at the young lady. There was Lawrence Colquhoun. Gabriel Cassilis looked everywhere for him, till he saw him lying beneath a tree, his head on his hand. He was not talking to Victoria, nor was he looking at her. On the contrary, he was watching Phillis. There was Captain Ladds. He was talking to one of the young ladies, and he was looking at Phillis. The young lady evidently did not like this. And there was Gilead Beck. He was standing apart, talking to Mrs. L'Estrange, with his hands in his pockets, leaning against a tree. But he too was casting furtive glances at Phillis.

They all seemed, somehow, looking at the girl. There was no special reason why they should look at her, except that she was so bright, so fresh, and so charming for the eye to rest upon. The other girls were as well dressed, but they were nowhere compared with Phillis. The lines of their figures, perhaps, were not so fine; the shape of their heads more commonplace; their features not so delicate; their pose less graceful. There are some girls who go well

together. Helena and Hermia are a foil to each other; but when Desdemona shows all other beauties pale like lesser lights. And the other beauties do not like it.

Said one of the fair guests to another,

'What do they see in her?'

'I cannot tell,' replied her friend. 'She seems to me more *farouche* than ever.'

For having decided that *farouche* was the word to express poor Phillis's distinguishing quality, there was no longer any room for question, and *farouche* she continued to be. If there is anything that Phillis never was, it is that quality of fierce shy wildness which requires the adjective *farouche*. But the word stuck, because it sounded well. To this day—to be sure, it is only a twelvemonth since—the girls say still, 'O, yes! Phillis Fleming. She was pretty, but extremely *farouche*.'

Gabriel Cassilis stood by the hedge and looked through the trees. He was come all the way from town to attend this party, and now he hesitated at the very gates. For he became conscious of two things: first, that the odd feeling of not finding his words was upon him again; and secondly, that he was not exactly dressed for a festive occasion. Like

most City men who have long remained bachelors, Gabriel Cassilis was careful of his personal appearance. He considered a garden-party as an occasion demanding something special. Now he not only wore his habitual pepper-and-salt suit, but the coat in which he wrote at his office—a comfortable easy old frock, a little baggy at the elbows. His mind was strung to such an intense pitch, that such a trifling objection as his dress—because Gabriel Cassilis never looked other than a gentleman—appeared to him insuperable. He withdrew from the hedge, and retraced his steps. Presently he came to a lane. He left the road, and turned down the path. He found himself by the river. He sat down under a tree, and began to think.

He thought of the time when his lonely life was wearisome to him, when he longed for a wife and a house of his own. He remembered how he pictured a girl who would be his darling, who would return his caresses and love him for his own sake. And how, when he met Victoria Pengelley, his thoughts changed, and he pictured that girl, stately and statuesque, at the head of his table. There would be no pettings and caressings from her, that was quite certain. On the other hand, there would be a woman of whom he would be proud—one who would

wear his wealth properly. And a woman of good family, well connected all round. There were no caresses, he remembered now; there was the coldest acceptance of him; and there had been no caresses since. But he had been proud of her; and as for her honour—how was it possible that the doubt should arise? That man must be himself distinctly of the lower order of men who would begin by doubting or suspecting his wife.

To end in this: doubt so strong as to be almost certainty; suspicion like a knife cutting at his heart; his brain clouded; and he himself driven to creep down clandestinely to watch his wife.

He sat there till the June sun began to sink in the west. The river was covered with the evening craft. They were manned by the young City men but just beginning the worship of Mammon, who would have looked with envy upon the figure sitting motionless in the shade by the river's edge had they known who he was. Presently he roused himself, and looked at his watch. It was past seven. Perhaps the party would be over by this time; he could go home with his wife; it would be something, at least, to be with her, to keep her from that other man. He rose,—his brain in a tumult,—and repaired once more to his point of vantage at the hedge. The

lawn was empty; there was no one there. But he saw his own carriage in the yard, and therefore his wife was not yet gone.

In the garden, no one. He crept in softly, and looked round him. No one saw him enter the place; and he felt something like a burglar as he walked, with a stealthy step which he vainly tried to make confident, across the lawn.

Two ways of entrance stood open before him. One was the porch of the house, covered with creepers and hung with flowers. The door stood open, and beyond it was the hall, looking dark from the bright light outside. He heard voices within. Another way was by the conservatory, the door of which was also open. He looked in. Among the flowers and the vines there stood a figure he knew—his wife's. But she was alone. And she was listening. On her face was an expression which he had never seen there, and never dreamed of. Her features were distorted; her hands were closed in a tight clutch; her arms were stiffened—but she was trembling. What was she doing? To whom was she listening?

He hesitated a moment, and then he stepped through the porch into the hall. The voices came from the right; in fact, from the morning-room,—

Phillis's room,—which opened by its single window upon the lawn, and by its two doors into the hall on one side and the conservatory on the other.

And Gabriel Cassilis, like his wife, listened. He put off his hat, placed his umbrella in the stand, and stood in attitude, in case he should be observed, to push open the door and step in. He was so abject in his jealousy, that he actually did not feel the disgrace and degradation of the act. He was so keen and eager to lose no word, that he leaned his head to the half-open door, and stood, his long thin figure trembling with excitement, like some listener in a melodrama of the transpontine stage.

There were two persons in the room, and one was a woman; and they were talking together. One was Lawrence Colquhoun, and the other was Phillis Fleming.

Colquhoun was not, according to his wont, lying on a sofa, nor sitting in the easiest of the chairs. He was standing, and he was speaking in an earnest voice.

'When I saw you first,' he said, 'you were little Phillis—a wee toddler of six or seven. I went away, and forgot all about you,—almost forgot your very existence, Phillis,—till the news of Mr. Dyson's death met me on my way home again. I fear that I have

neglected you since I came home; but I have been worried.'

'What has worried you, Lawrence?' asked the girl.

She was sitting on the music-stool before the piano; and as she spoke she turned from the piano, her fingers resting silently on the notes. She was dressed for the party,—which was over now, and the guests departed,—in a simple muslin costume, light and airy, which became her well. And in her hair she had placed a flower. There were flowers all about the room, flowers at the open window, flowers in the conservatory beyond, flowers on the bright green lawns beyond.

'How pretty you are, Phillis!' answered her guardian.

He touched her cheek with his finger as she sat.

'I am your guardian,' he said, as if in apology.

'And you have been worried about things?' she persisted. 'Agatha says you never care what happens.'

'Agatha is right, as a rule. In one case, of which she knows nothing, she is wrong. Tell me, Phillis, is there anything you want, in the world, that I can get for you?'

'I think I have everything,' she said, laughing.

'And what you will not give me I shall wait for till I am twenty-one.'

'You mean—'

'I mean—Jack Dunquerque, Lawrence.'

Only a short month ago, and Jack Dunquerque was her friend. She could speak of him openly and freely, without change of voice or face. Now she blushed, and her voice trembled as she uttered his name. That is one of the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual state known to the most elementary observers.

'I wanted to speak about him. Phillis, you are very young; you have seen nothing of the world; you know no other men. All I ask you is to wait. Do not give your promise to this man till you have at least had an opportunity of—of comparing—of learning your own mind.'

She shook her head.

'I have already given my promise,' she said.

'But it is a promise that may be recalled,' he urged. 'Dunquerque is a gentleman; he will not hold you to your word when he feels that he ought not to have taken it from you. Phillis, you do not know yourself. You have no idea of what it is that you have given, or its value. How can I tell you the truth?'

'I think you mean the best for me, Lawrence,' she said. 'But the best is—Jack.'

Then she began to speak quite low, so that the listeners heard nothing.

'See, Lawrence, you are kind, and I can tell you all without being ashamed. I think of Jack all day long and all night. I pray for him in the morning and in the evening. When he comes near me I tremble; I feel that I must obey him if he were to order me in anything. I have no more command of myself when he is with me—'

'Stop, Phillis,' Lawrence interposed; 'you must not tell me any more. I was trying to act for the best; but I will make no further opposition. See, my dear'—he took her hand in his in a tender and kindly way—'if I write to Jack Dunquerque to-day, and tell the villain he may come and see you whenever he likes, and that he shall marry you whenever you like, will that do for you?'

She started to her feet, and threw her left hand—Lawrence still holding the right—upon his shoulder, looking him full in the face.

'Will it do? O Lawrence! Agatha always said you were the kindest man in the world; and I—forgive me!—I did not believe it, I could not understand it. O Jack, Jack, we shall be so happy, so

happy! He loves me, Lawrence, as much as I love him.'

The listeners in the greenhouse and the hall craned their necks, but they could hear little, because the girl spoke low.

'Does he love you as much as you love him, Phillis? Does he love you a thousand times better than you can understand? Why, child, you do not know what love means. Perhaps women never do quite realise what it means. Only go on believing that he loves you, and love him in return, and all will be well with you.'

'I do believe it, Lawrence; and I love him too.'

Looking through the flowers and the leaves of the conservatory glared a face upon the pair strangely out of harmony with the peace which breathed in the atmosphere of the place—a face violently distorted by passion, a face in which every evil feeling was at work, a face dark with rage. Phillis might have seen the face had she looked in that direction, but she did not; she held Lawrence's hand, and she was shyly pressing it in gratitude.

'Phillis,' said Lawrence hoarsely, 'Jack Dunquerque is a lucky man. We all love you, my dear; and I almost as much as Jack. But I am too old for you; and besides, besides—' He cleared his throat,

and spoke more distinctly. 'I do love you, however, Phillis; a man could not be long beside you without loving you.'

There was a movement and a rustle in the leaves.

The man at the door stood bewildered. What was it all about? Colquhoun and a woman—not his wife—talking of love. What love? what woman? And his wife in the conservatory, looking as he never saw her look before, and listening. What did it all mean? what thing was coming over him? He pressed his hand to his forehead, trying to make out what it all meant, for he seemed to be in a dream; and, as before, while he tried to shape the words in his mind for some sort of an excuse, or a reassurance to himself, he found that no words came, or, if any, then the wrong words.

The house was very quiet; no sounds came from any part of it,—the servants were resting in the kitchen, the mistress of the house was resting in her room, after the party,—no voices but the gentle talk of the girl and her guardian.

'Kiss me, Phillis,' said Lawrence. 'Then let me hold you in my arms for once, because you are so sweet, and—and I am your guardian, you know, and we all love you.'

He drew her gently by the hands. She made no

resistance ; it seemed to her right that her guardian should kiss her if he wished. She did not know how the touch of her hand, the light in her eyes, the sound of her voice, were stirring in the man before her depths that he thought long ago buried and put away, awakening once more the possibilities, at forty, of a youthful love.

His lips were touching her forehead, her face was close to his, he held her two hands tight, when the crash of a falling flower-pot startled him, and Victoria Cassilis stood before him.

Panting, gasping for breath, with hands clenched and eyes distended—a living statue of the *femina demens*. For a moment she paused to take breath, and then, with a wave of her hand which was grand because it was natural and worthy of Rachel—because you may see it any day among the untutored beauties of Whitechapel, among the gipsy camps, or in the villages where Hindoo women live and quarrel —Victoria Cassilis for once in her life was herself, and acted superbly, because she did not act at all.

'Victoria!' The word came from Lawrence.

Phillis, with a little cry of terror, clung tightly to her guardian's arm.

'Leave him!' cried the angry woman. 'Do you hear?—leave him!'

'Better go, Phillis,' said Lawrence.

At the prospect of battle the real nature of the man asserted itself. He drew himself erect, and met her wild eyes with a steady gaze, which had neither terror nor surprise in it—a gaze such as a mad doctor might practise upon his patients, a look which calms the wildest outbreaks, because it sees in them nothing but what it expected to find, and is only sorry.

'No! she shall not go,' said Victoria, sweeping her skirts behind her with a splendid movement from her feet; 'she shall not go until she has heard me first. You dare to make love to this girl, this schoolgirl, before my very eyes. She shall know, she shall know our secret!'

'Victoria,' said Lawrence calmly, 'you do not understand what you are saying. *Our* secret? Say your secret, and be careful.'

The door moved an inch or two; the man standing behind it was shaking in every limb. 'Their secret? her secret?' He was going to learn at last; he was going to find the truth; he was going— And here a sudden thought struck him that he had neglected his affairs of late, and that, this business once got through, he must look into things again; a thought without words, because, somehow, just then he had no words —he had forgotten them all.

The writer of the anonymous letters had done much mischief, as she hoped to do. People who write anonymous letters generally contrive so much. Unhappily, the beginning of mischief is like the boring of a hole in a dam or dyke, because very soon, instead of a trickling rivulet of water, you get a gigantic inundation. Nothing is easier than to have your revenge; only it is so very difficult to calculate the after consequences of revenge. If the writer of the letters had known what was going to happen in consequence, most likely they would never have been written.

'Their secret? her secret?' He listened with all his might. But Victoria, his wife Victoria, spoke out clearly; he could hear without straining his ears.

'Be careful,' repeated Lawrence.

'I shall not be careful; the time is past for care. You have sneered and scoffed at me; you have insulted me; you have refused almost to know me,—all that I have borne, but this I will not bear.'

'Phillis Fleming.' She turned to the girl. Phillis did not shrink or cower before her; on the contrary, she stood like Lawrence, calm and quiet, to face the storm, whatever storm might be brewing. 'This man takes you in his arms and kisses you.

He says he loves you; he dares to tell you he loves you. No doubt you are flattered. You have had the men round you all day long, and now you have the best of them at your feet, alone, when they are gone. Well, the man you want to catch, the excellent *parti* you and Agatha would like to trap, the man who stands there—'

'Victoria, there is still time to stop,' said Lawrence calmly.

'That man is my husband!'

Phillis looked from one to the other, understanding nothing. The man stood quietly stroking his great beard with his fingers, and looking straight at Mrs. Cassilis.

'My husband. We were married six years ago and more. We were married in Scotland, privately; but he is my husband, and five days after our wedding he left me. Is that true?'

'Perfectly. You have forgotten nothing, except the reason of my departure. If you think it worth while troubling Phillis with that, why—'

'We quarrelled; that was the reason. He used cruel and bitter language. He gave me back my liberty.'

'We separated, Phillis, after a row, the like of which you may conceive by remembering that Mrs.

Cassilis was then six years younger, and even more ready for such encounters than at present. We separated; we agreed that things should go on as if the marriage, which was no marriage, had never taken place. Janet, the maid, was to be trusted. She stayed with her mistress; I went abroad. And then I heard by accident that my wife had taken the liberty I gave her, in its fullest sense, by marrying again. Then I came home, because I thought that chapter was closed; but it was not, you see; and for her sake I wish I had stayed in America.'

Mrs. Cassilis listened as if she did not hear a word; then she went on,

'He is my husband still. I can claim him when I want him; and I claim him now. I say, Lawrence, so long as I live you shall marry no other woman. You are mine; whatever happens, you are mine.'

The sight of the man, callous, immovable, suddenly seemed to terrify her. She sank weeping at his knees.

'Lawrence, forgive me, forgive me! Take me away. I never loved any one but you. Forgive me!'

He made no answer or any sign.

'Let me go with you, somewhere, out of this place; let us go away together, we two. I have never loved any one but you—never any one but you, but you.'

She broke into a passion of sobs. When she looked up, it was to meet the white face of Gabriel Cassilis. He was stooping over her, his hands spread out helplessly, his form quivering, his lips trying to utter something, but no sound came through them. Beyond stood Lawrence, still with the look of watchful determination which had broken down her rage. Then she sprang to her feet.

'You here? Then you know all. It is true; that is my legal husband. For two years and more my life has been a lie. Stand back, and let me go to my husband!'

But he stood between Colquhoun and herself. Lawrence saw with a sudden terror that something had happened to the man. He expected an outburst of wrath, but no wrath came. Gabriel Cassilis turned his head from one to the other, and presently said in a trembling voice,

'A fine day, and seasonable weather for the time of year.'

'Good God!' cried Lawrence, 'you have destroyed his reason!'

Gabriel Cassilis shook his head, and began again,

'A fine day, and seasonable—'

Here he threw himself upon the nearest chair, and buried his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XII.

'Then a babbled of green fields.'

And then there was silence. Which of them was to speak? Not the woman who had wrought this mischief; not the man who knew of the wickedness but had not spoken; not the innocent girl who only perceived that something dreadful—something beyond the ordinary run of dreadful events—had happened, and that Victoria Cassilis looked out of her senses. Lawrence Colquhoun stood unmoved by her tears; his face was hardened; it bore a look beneath which the guilty woman cowered. Yet she looked at him, and not at her husband.

Presently Colquhoun spoke. His voice was harsh, and his words were a command.

'Go home,' he said to Victoria. 'There is no more mischief for you to do—go!'

She obeyed without a word. She threw the light wrapper which she carried on her arm round her slender neck, and walked away, restored, to outward seeming, to all her calm and stately coldness. The coachman and the footman noticed nothing. If any

of her acquaintances passed her on the road, they saw no change in her. The woman was impassive and impenetrable.

Did she love Colquhoun? No one knows. She loved to feel that she had him in her power; she was driven to a mad jealousy when that power slipped quite away; and, although she had broken the vows which both once swore to keep, she could not bear even to think that he should do the same. And she did despise her husband, the man of shares, companies, and stocks. But could she love Colquhoun? Such a woman may feel the passion of jealousy; she may rejoice in the admiration which gratifies her vanity; but she is far too cold and selfish for love. It is an artful fable of the ancients which makes Narcissus pine away and die for the loss of his own image, for thereby they teach the great lesson that he who loves himself destroys himself.

The carriage wheels crunched over the gravel, and Gabriel Cassilis raised a pale and trembling face —a face with so much desolation and horror, such a piteous gaze of questioning reproach at Colquhoun, that the man's heart melted within him. He seemed to have grown old suddenly; his hair looked whiter; he trembled as one who has the palsy; and his eyes mutely asked the question, 'Is this thing true?'

Lawrence Colquhoun made answer. His voice was low and gentle; his eyes were filled with tears.

'It is true, Mr. Cassilis. God knows I would have spared you the knowledge. But it is true.'

Gabriel Cassilis opened his lips as if to speak. But he refrained, stopping suddenly because he recollected that he could no longer utter what he wished to say. Then he touched his mouth with his fingers like a dumb man. He was worse than a dumb man who cannot speak at all, because his tongue, if he allowed it, uttered words which had no connection with his thoughts. Men that have been called possessed of the devil have knelt at altars, uttering blasphemous impieties when their souls were full of prayer.

'Do you understand me, Mr. Cassilis? Do you comprehend what I am saying?

He nodded his head.

Colquhoun took a piece of notepaper from the writing-table, and laid it before him with a pencil. Mr. Cassilis grasped the pencil eagerly, and began to write. From his fingers, as from his tongue, came the sentence which he did *not* wish to write:

'A fine day, and seasonable weather for the time of year.'

He looked at this result with sorrowful heart, and showed it to Colquhoun, shaking his head.

'Good heavens!' cried Colquhoun, 'his mind is gone.'

Gabriel Cassilis touched him on the arm and shook his head.

'He understands you, Lawrence,' said Phillis; 'but he cannot explain himself. Something has gone wrong with him which we do not know.'

Gabriel Cassilis nodded gratefully to Phillis.

'Then, Mr. Cassilis,' Colquhoun began, 'it is right that you should know all. Six years ago I followed Victoria Pengelley into Scotland. We were married privately at a registrar's office, under assumed names. If you ever want to know where and by what names, you have only to ask me, and I will tell you. There were reasons, she said,—I never quite understood what they were, but she chose to be a *fille romanesque* at the time,—why the marriage should be kept secret. After the wedding ceremony —such as it was—she left the office with her maid, who was the only witness, and returned to the friends with whom she was staying. I met her every day; but always in that house and among other people. A few days passed. She would not, for some whim of her own, allow the marriage to be disclosed. We

quarrelled for that, and other reasons—my fault, possibly. Good God! what a honeymoon! To meet the woman you love—your bride—in society; if for half an hour alone, then in the solitude of open observation; to quarrel like people who have been married for forty years— Well, perhaps it was my fault. On the fifth day we agreed to let things be as if they had never been. I left my bride, who was not my wife, in anger. We used bitter words—perhaps I the bitterest. And when we parted, I bade her go back to her old life as if nothing had been promised on either side. I said she should be free; that I would never claim the power and the rights given me by a form of words; that she might marry again; that, to leave her the more free, I would go away and never return till she was married, or till she gave me leave. I was away for four years; and then I saw the announcement of her marriage in the paper, and I returned. That is the bare history, Mr. Cassilis. Since my return, on my honour as a gentleman, you have had no cause for jealousy in my own behaviour towards—your wife, not mine. Remember, Mr. Cassilis, whatever else may be said, she never was my wife. And yet, in the eyes of the law, I suppose, she is my wife still. And, with all my heart, I pity you.'

He stopped, and looked at the victim of the crime. Gabriel Cassilis was staring helplessly from him to Phillis. Did he understand? Not entirely, I think. Yet the words which he had heard fell upon his heart softly, and soothed him in his trouble. At last his eyes rested on Phillis, as if asking, as men do in times of trouble, for the quick comprehension of a woman.

'What can I do, Mr. Cassilis?' asked the girl. 'If you cannot speak, will you make some sign? Any little sign that I can understand?'

She remembered that among her lesson-books was a dictionary. She put that into his hand, and asked him to show her in the dictionary what he wished to say.

He took the book in his trembling hands, turned over the leaves, and, presently finding the page he wanted, ran his fingers down the lines till they rested on a word.

Phillis read it, spelling it out in her pretty little schoolgirl fashion.

'S, I, si; L, E, N, C, E, lence—silence. Is that what you wish to say, Mr. Cassilis?'

He nodded.

'Silence,' repeated Lawrence. 'For all our sakes it is the best—the only thing. Phillis, tell

no one what you have heard; not even Agatha; not even Jack Dunquerque. Or, if you tell Jack Dunquerque, send him to me directly afterwards. Do you promise, child?'

'I promise, Lawrence. I will tell no one but Jack; and I shall ask him first if he thinks I ought to tell him another person's secret.'

'Thank you, Phillis. Mr. Cassilis, there are only we three and—and one more. You may trust Phillis when she promises a thing; you may trust me, for my own sake; you may, I hope, trust that other person. And as for me, it is my intention to leave England in a week. I deeply regret that I ever came back to this country.'

A week was too far ahead for Mr. Cassilis to look forward to in his agitation. Clearly the one thing in his mind at the moment—the one possible thing—was concealment. He took the dictionary again, and found the word 'Home.'

'Will you let me take you home, sir?' Lawrence asked.

He nodded again. There was no resentment in his face, and none in his feeble confiding manner when he took Lawrence's arm and leaned upon it as he crawled out to the carriage.

Only one sign of feeling. He took Phillis by

the hand and kissed her. When he had kissed her, he laid his finger on her lips. And she understood his wish that no one should learn this thing.

'Not even Agatha, Phillis,' said Lawrence. 'Forget, if you can. And if you cannot, keep silence.'

They drove into town together, these men with a secret between them. Lawrence made no further explanations. What was there to explain? The one who suffered the most sat upright, looking straight before him in mute suffering.

It is a long drive from Twickenham to Kensington Palace Gardens. When they arrived, Mr. Cassilis was too weak to step out of the carriage. They helped him—Lawrence Colquhoun and a footman—into the hall. He was feeble with long fasting as much as from the effects of this dreadful shock.

They carried him to his study. Among the servants who looked on was Tomlinson, the middle-aged maid with the harsh face. She knew that her bolt had fallen at last; and she saw, too, that it had fallen upon the wrong person, for up-stairs sat her mistress, calm, cold, and collected. She came home looking pale and a little worn; fatigued, perhaps, with the constant round of engagements, though the season was little more than half over.

She dressed in gentle silence, which Tomlinson could not understand. She went down to dinner alone, and presently went to her drawing-room, where she sat in a window, and thought.

There Colquhoun found her.

'I have told him all,' he said. 'Your words told him only half, and yet too much. You were never my wife, as you know, and never will be, though the Law may make you take my name. Cruel and heartless woman! to gratify an insensate jealousy you have destroyed your husband.'

'Is he—is he—dead?' she cried, almost as if she wished he were.

'No; he is not dead; he is struck with some fit. He cannot speak. Learn, now, that your jealousy was without foundation. Phillis will marry Dunquerque. As for me, I can never marry, as you know.'

'He is not dead!' she echoed, taking no notice of the last words. Indeed, Phillis was quite out of her thoughts now. 'Does he wish to see me?'

'No; you must not, at present, attempt to see him.'

'What will they do to me, Lawrence?' she asked again. 'What can they do? I did not mean him to hear. It was all to frighten you.'

'To frighten me! What they can do, Mrs. Cassilis, is to put you in the prisoner's box and me in the witness box. What he wants to do, so far as we can yet understand, is to keep silence.'

'What is the good of that? He will cry his wrongs all over the town, and Phillis will tell everybody.'

'Phillis will tell no one, no one—not even Agatha. It was lucky that Agatha heard nothing; she was up-stairs, lying down after her party. Will you keep silence?'

'Of course I shall. What else is there for me to do?'

'For the sake of your husband; for the sake of your boy—'

'It is for my own sake, Lawrence,' she interrupted coldly.

'I beg your pardon. I ought to have known by this time that you would have acted for your own sake only. Victoria, it was an evil day for me when I met you; it was a worse day when I consented to a secret marriage, which was no marriage, when there was no reason for any secrecy; it was the worst day of all when I answered your letter, and came here to see you. Every day we have met has produced more recrimination. That would not

have mattered, but for the mischief our meeting has wrought upon your husband. I pray that we may never in this world meet again.'

He was gone, and Victoria Cassilis has not met him since, nor do I think now that she ever will meet him again.

The summer night closed in; the moonlight came up and shone upon the Park before her, laying silvery patches of light in tens of thousands upon the young leaves of the trees, and darkening the shadows a deeper black by way of contrast. They brought her tea and lights; then they came for orders. There were none; she would not go out that night. At eleven Tomlinson came.

'I want nothing, Tomlinson. You need not wait up; I shall not want you this evening.'

'Yes, madam; no, madam. Mr. Cassilis is asleep, madam.'

'Let some one sit up with him. See to that, Tomlinson; and don't let him be disturbed.'

'I will sit up with him myself, madam.' Tomlinson was anxious to get to the bottom of the thing. What mischief had been done, and how far was it her own doing? To persons who want revenge these are very important questions, when mischief has actually been perpetrated.

Then Victoria was left alone. In that great house, with its troop of servants and nurses, with her husband and child, there was no one who cared to know what she was doing. The master was not popular, because he simply regarded every servant as a machine; but at least he was just, and he paid well, and the house, from the point of view likely to be taken by Mr. Plush and Miss Hairpin, was a comfortable one. The mistress of the house was unpopular. Her temper at times was intolerable, her treatment of servants showed no consideration; and the womenfolk regarded the neglect of her own child with the horror of such neglect in which the Englishwoman of all ranks is trained. So she was alone, and remained alone. The hands of the clock went round and round; the moon went down, and over the garden lay the soft sepia twilight of June; the lamp on the little table at her elbow went out; but she sat still, hands crossed in her lap, looking out of window, and thinking.

She saw, but she did not feel the wickedness of it, a cold and selfish girl ripening into a cold and selfish woman—one to whom the outer world was as a panorama of moving objects, meaning nothing and having no connection with herself. Like one blind, deaf, and dumb, she moved among the mobs who

danced and sang, or who grovelled and wept. She had no tears to help the sufferers, and no smiles to encourage the happy; she had never been able to sympathise with the acting of a theatre or the puppets of a novel; she was so cold that she was not even critical. It seems odd, but it is really true, that a critic may be actually too cold. She saw a mind that, like the Indian devotee, was occupied for ever in contemplating itself; she saw beauty which would have been irresistible had there been one gleam, just one gleam, of womanly tenderness; she saw one man after the other, first attracted and then repelled; and then she came to the one man who was not repelled. There was once an unfortunate creature who dared to make love to Diana. His fate is recorded in Lemprière's Dictionary; also in Dr. Smith's later and more expensive work. Lawrence Colquhoun resembled that swain, and his fate was not unlike the classical punishment. She went through the form of marriage with him, and then she drove him from her by the cold wind of her own intense selfishness—a very Mistral. When he was gone she began to regret a slave of such uncomplaining slavishness. Well, no one knew except Janet; Janet did not talk. It was rather a struggle, she remembered, to take Gabriel Cassilis—rather a

struggle, because Lawrence Colquhoun might come home and tell the story, not because there was anything morally wrong. She was most anxious to see him when he did come home—out of curiosity, out of jealousy, out of a desire to know whether her old power was gone; out of fear, out of that reason which makes a criminal seek out from time to time the scene and accomplices of his crime, and for the thousand reasons which make up a selfish woman's code of conduct. It was three o'clock and daylight when she discovered that she had really thought the whole thing over from the beginning, and that there was nothing more to think about, except the future —a distasteful subject to all sinners.

'After all,' she summed up as she rose to go to bed, 'it is as well. Lawrence and I should never have got along. He is too selfish, much too selfish.'

Down-stairs they were watching over the stricken man. The doctor came and felt his pulse; he also looked wise, and wrote things in Latin on a paper, which he gave to a servant. Then he went away, and said he would come in the morning again. He was a great doctor, with a title, and quite believed to know everything; but he did not know what had befallen this patient.

When Gabriel Cassilis awoke there was some

confusion in his mind, and his brain was wandering —at least it appeared so, because what he said had nothing to do with any possible wish or thought. He rambled at large and at length; and then he grew angry, and then he became suddenly sorrowful, and sighed; then he became perfectly silent. The confused babble of speech ceased as suddenly as it had come; and since that morning Gabriel Cassilis has not spoken.

It was at half-past nine that his secretary called, simultaneously with the doctor.

He heard something from the servants, and pushed into the room where his chief was lying. The eyes of the sick man opened languidly and fell upon his first officer, but they expressed no interest and asked no question.

'Ah!' sighed Mr. Mowll, in the impatience of a sympathy which has but little time to spare. 'Will he recover, doctor?'

'No doubt, no doubt. This way, my dear sir.' He led the secretary out of the room. 'Hush! he understands what is said. This is no ordinary seizure. Has he received any shock?'

'Shock enough to kill thirty men,' said the secretary. 'Where was he yesterday? Why did he not say something—do something—to avert the disaster?'

'O! Then the shock has been of a financial kind? I gathered from Mr. Colquhoun that it was of a family nature—something sudden and distressing.'

'Family nature!' echoed the secretary. 'Who ever heard of Mr. Cassilis worrying himself about family matters? No, sir; when a man is ruined he has no time to bother about family matters.'

'Ruined? The great Mr. Gabriel Cassilis ruined?'

'I should say so, and I ought to know. They say so in the City; they will say so to-night in the papers. If he were well, and able to face things, there might be—no, even then there could be no hope. Settling-day this very morning; and a pretty settling it is.'

'Whatever day it is,' said the doctor, 'I cannot have him disturbed. You may return in three or four hours, if you like, and then perhaps he may be able to speak to you. Just now, leave him in peace.'

What had happened was this:

When Mr. Cassilis caused to be circulated a certain pamphlet which we have heard of, impugning the resources of the Republic of Eldorado, he wished the stock to go down. It did go down, and he bought in—bought in so largely that he held two millions of the stock. Men in his position do not buy large

quantities of stock without affecting the price—Stock Exchange transactions are not secret—and Eldorado stock went up. This was what Gabriel Cassilis naturally desired. Also the letter of El Señor Don Bellaco de la Carambola to the *Times*, showing the admirable way in which Eldorado loans were received and administered, helped. The stock went up from 64, at which price Gabriel Cassilis bought in, to 75, at which he should have sold. Had he done so at the right moment, he would have realised the very handsome sum of two hundred and sixty thousand pounds; but the trouble of the letters came, and prevented him from acting.

While his mind was agitated by these—agitated, as we have seen, to such an extent that he could no longer think or work, or attend to any kind of business—there arrived for him telegram after telegram, in his own cipher, from America. These lay unopened. It was disastrous, because they announced beforehand the fact which only his correspondent knew—the Eldorado bonds were no longer to be paid.

That fact was now public. It was made known by all the papers that Eldorado, having paid the interest out of the money borrowed, had no further resources whatever, and could pay no more. It was

stated in leading articles that England should have known all along what a miserable country Eldorado is. The British public were warned too late not to trust in Eldorado promises any more ; and the unfortunates who held Eldorado stock were actuated by one common impulse to sell, and no one would buy. It was absurd to quote Eldorado bonds at anything ; and the great financier had to meet his engagements by finding the difference between stock at 64 and stock at next to nothing for two millions.

Gabriel Cassilis was consequently ruined. When it became known that he had some sort of stroke, people said it was the shock of the fatal news. He made the one mistake of an otherwise faultless career, they said to each other, in trusting Eldorado, and his brain could not stand the blow. When the secretary, who understood the cipher, came to open the letters and telegrams, he left off talking about the fatal shock of the news. It must have been something else—something he knew nothing of, because he saw the blow might have been averted; and the man's mind, clear enough when he went in for a great coup, had become unhinged during the few days before the smash.

Ruined ! Gabriel Cassilis knew nothing about the wreck of his life, as he lay upon his bed, afraid to

speak because he would only babble incoherently. All was gone from him—money, reputation, wife. He had no longer anything. The anonymous correspondent had taken all away.

CHAPTER XIII.

'This comes of airy visions and the whispers
Of demons like to angels. Brother, weep.'

Gilead Beck, returning from the Twickenham party before the explosion, found Jack Dunquerque waiting for him. As we have seen, he was not invited.

'Tell me how she was looking,' he cried. 'Did she ask after me?'

'Wal, Mr. Dunquerque, I reckon you the most fortunate individual in the hull world. She looked like an angel, and she talked about you like a—like a woman, with pretty blushes; and yet she wasn't ashamed neither. Seems as if bein' ashamed isn't her strong point. And what has she got to be ashamed of?'

'Did Colquhoun say anything?'

'We had already got upon the subject, and I had ventured to make him a proposition. You see, Mr. Dunquerque'—he grew confused, and hesitated—'fact is, I want you to look at things just exactly as I do. I'm rich. I have struck Ile; that Ile is the

mightiest Special Providence ever given to a single man. But it's given for Purposes. And one of those Purposes is that some of it's got to go to you.'

'To me?'

'To you, Mr. Dunquerque. Who fired that shot? Who delivered me from the Grisly?'

'Why, Ladds did as much as I.'

Mr. Beck shook his head.

'Captain Ladds is a fine fellow,' he said. 'Steady as a rock is Captain Ladds. There's nobody I'd rather march under if we'd the war to do all over again. But the Ile isn't for Captain Ladds. It isn't for him that the Golden Butterfly fills me with yearnin's. No, sir. I owe it all to you. You've saved my life; you've sought me out, and gone about this city with me; you've put me up to ropes; you've taken me to that sweet creature's house and made her my friend. And Mrs. L'Estrange my friend too. If I was to turn away and forget you, I should deserve to lose that precious Inseek.'

He paused for a minute.

'I said to Mr. Colquhoun, "Mr. Dunquerque shall have half of my pile, and more, if he wants it. Only you let him come back again to Miss Fleming." And he laughed in his easy way; there's no kind of

man in the States like that Mr. Colquhoun—seems as if he never wants to get anything. He laughed, and lay back on the grass. And then he said, "My dear fellow, let Jack come back if he likes; there's no fighting against fate; only let him have the decency not to announce his engagement till Phillis has had her first season." Then he drank some cider-cup, and lay back again. Mrs. Cassilis—she's a very superior woman that, but a trifle cold, I should say—watched him whenever he spoke. She's got a game of her own, onless I am mistaken.'

'But, Beck,' Jack gasped, 'I can't do this thing; I can't take your money.'

'I guess, sir, you can, and I guess you will. Come, Mr. Dunquerque, say you won't go against Providence. There's a sweet young lady waiting for you, and a little mountain of dollars.'

But Jack shook his head.

'I thank you all the same,' he said. 'I shall never forget your generosity—never. But that cannot be.'

'We will leave it to Miss Fleming,' said Gilead. 'What Miss Fleming says is to be, shall be—'

He was interrupted by the arrival of two letters.

The first was from Joseph Jagenal. It informed him that he had learned from his brothers that they

had received money from him on account of work which he thought would never be done. He enclosed a cheque for the full amount, with many thanks for his kindness, and the earnest hope that he would advance nothing more.

In the letter was his cheque for 400*l.*, the amount which the Twins had borrowed during the four weeks of their acquaintance.

Mr. Beck put the cheque in his pocket, and opened the other letter. It was from Cornelius, and informed him that the Poem could not possibly be finished in the time; that it was rapidly advancing; but that he could not pledge himself to completing the work by October. Also that his brother Humphrey found himself in the same position as regarded the Picture. He ended by the original statement that Art cannot be forced.

Mr. Beck laughed.

'Not straight men, Mr. Dunquerque. I suspected it first when they backed out at the dinner, and left me to do the talk. Wal, they may be high-toned, whole-souled, and talented; but give me the man who works. Now, Mr. Dunquerque, if you please, we'll go and have some dinner, and you shall talk about Miss Fleming. And the day after to-morrow—you note that down—I've asked Mrs.

L'Estrange and Miss Phillis to breakfast. Captain Ladds is coming, and Mr. Colquhoun. And you shall sit next to her. Mrs. Cassilis is coming too. When I asked her she wanted to know if Mr. Colquhoun was to be there. I said yes. Then she wanted to know if Phillis was to be there. I said yes. Then she set her lips hard, and said, "I will come, Mr. Beck." She isn't happy, that lady; she's got somethin' on her mind.'

That evening Joseph Jagenal had an unpleasant duty to perform. It was at dinner that he spoke. The Twins were just taking their first glass of port. He had been quite silent through dinner, eating little. Now he looked from one to the other without a word.

They changed colour. Instinctively they knew what was coming. He said with a gulp:

'I am sorry to find that my brothers have not been acting honourably.'

'What is this, brother Humphrey?' asked Cornelius.

'I do not know, brother Cornelius,' said the Artist.

'I will tell you,' said Joseph, 'what they have done. They made a disingenuous attempt to en-

gage the affections of a rich young lady for the sake of her money.'

'If Humphrey loved the girl—' began Cornelius.

'If Cornelius was devoted to Phillis Fleming—' began Humphrey.

'I was not, Humphrey,' said Cornelius. 'No such thing. And I told you so.'

'I never did love her,' said Humphrey. 'I always said it was you.'

This was undignified.

'I do not care which it was. It belongs to both. Then you went down to her again, under the belief that she was engaged to—to—the Lord knows which of you—and solemnly broke it off.'

Neither spoke this time.

'Another thing. I regret to find that my brothers, having made a contract for certain work with Mr. Gilead Beck, and having been partly paid in advance, are not executing the work.'

'There, Joseph,' said Humphrey, waving his hand as if this was a matter on quite another footing, 'you must excuse us. We know what is right in Art, if we know nothing else. Art, Joseph, cannot be forced.'

Cornelius murmured assent.

'We have our dignity to stand upon; we retreat

with dignity. We say, "We will not be forced; we will give the world our best."'

'Good,' said Joseph. 'That is very well; but where is the money?'

Neither answered.

'I have returned that money; but it is a large sum, and you must repay me in part. Understand me, brothers. You may stay here as long as I live; I shall never ask more of you than to respect the family name. There was a time when you promised great things, and I believed in you. It is only quite lately that I have learned to my sorrow that all this promise has been for years a pretence. You sleep all day—you call it work. You habitually drink too much at night. You, Cornelius'—the Poet started—'have not put pen to paper for years. You, Humphrey'—the Artist hung his head—'have neither drawn nor painted anything since you came to live with me. I cannot make either of you work. I cannot retrieve the past. I cannot restore lost habits of industry. I cannot even make you feel your fall from the promise of your youth, or remember the hopes of our father. What I can do is to check your intemperate habits by such means as are in my power.'

He stopped; they were trembling violently.

'Half of the 400*l.* which you have drawn from Mr. Beck will be paid by household saving. Wine will disappear from my table; brandy-and-soda will have to be bought at your own expense. I shall order the dinners, and I shall keep the key of the wine-cellar.'

A year has passed. The Twins have had a sad time; they look forward with undisguised eagerness to the return of the years of fatness; they have exhausted their own little income in purchasing the means for their midnight *séances;* and they have run up a frightful score at the Carnarvon Arms.

But they still keep up bravely the pretence about their work.

CHAPTER XIV.

'So, on the ruins he himself had made,
Sat Marius reft of all his former glory.'

'Can you understand me, sir?'

Gabriel Cassilis sat in his own study. It was the day after the garden-party. He slept through the night, and in the morning rose and dressed as usual. Then he took his seat in his customary chair at his table. Before him lay papers, but he did not read them. He sat upright, his frock-coat tightly buttoned across his chest, and rapped his knuckles with his gold eyeglasses as if he was thinking.

They brought him breakfast, and he took a cup of tea. Then he motioned them to take the things away. They gave him the *Times*, and he laid it mechanically at his elbow. But he did not speak, nor did he seem to attend to what was done around him. And his eyes had a far-off look in them.

'Can you understand me, sir?'

The speaker was his secretary. He came in a

cab, panting, eager, to see if there was still any hope. Somehow or other it was whispered already in the City that Gabriel Cassilis had had some sort of stroke. And there was terrible news besides.

Mr. Mowll asked because there was something in his patron's face which frightened him. His eyes were changed. They had lost the keen sharp look which in a soldier means victory ; in a scholar, clearness of purpose ; in a priest, knowledge of human nature and ability to use that knowledge ; in a financier, the power and the intuition of success. That was gone. In its place an expression almost of childish softness. And another thing—the lips, once set firm and close, were parted now and mobile.

The other things were nothing. That a man of sixty-five should in a single night become a man of eighty ; that the iron-gray hair should become white ; that a steady hand should shake and straight shoulders be bent. It was the look in the face, the far-off look which made the secretary ask that question before he went on.

Mr. Cassilis nodded his head gently. He could understand.

'You left the telegrams unopened for a week and more,' cried the impatient clerk. 'Why—O why—did you not let me open them ?'

There was no reply.

'If I had known, I could have acted. Even the day before yesterday I could have acted. The news came yesterday morning. It was all over the City by three. And Eldorados down to nothing in a moment.'

Mr. Cassilis looked a mild inquiry. No anxiety in that look at all.

'Eldorado won't pay up her interest. It's due next week. Nothing to pay it with. Your agent in New York telegraphed this a week ago. He's been confirming the secret every day since. O Lord! O Lord! And you the only man who had the knowledge, and all that stake in it! Can't you speak, sir?'

For his master's silence was terrible to him.

'Listen, then. Ten days ago Eldorados went down after Wylie's pamphlet. You told him what to write and you paid him, just as you did last year. But you tried to hide it from me. That was wrong, sir. I've served you faithfully for twenty years. But never mind that. You bought in at 64. Then the Eldorado minister wrote to the paper. Stock went up to 75. You stood to win, only the day before yesterday, 260,000*l.*; more than a quarter of a million. Yesterday by three they were down to 16.

This morning they are down to 8. And it's settling-day, and you lose—you lose—your all. O, what a day, what a day!'

Still no complaint, not even a sigh from the patient man in the Windsor chair. Only that gentle tapping of the knuckles and that far-off look.

'The great name of Gabriel Cassilis dragged in the dust! All your reputation gone — the whole work of your life—O, sir, can't you feel even that? Can't you feel the dreadful end of it all—Gabriel Cassilis, the great Gabriel Cassilis, a LAME DUCK!'

Not even that. The work of his life was forgotten with all its hopes, and the great financier, listening to his clerk with the polite impatience of one who listens to a wearisome sermon, was trying to understand what was the meaning of that black shadow which lay upon his mind and made him uneasy. For the rest a perfect calm in his brain.

'People will say it was the shock of the Eldorado smash. Well, sir, it wasn't that; I know so much; but it's best to let people think so. If you haven't a penny left in the world you have your character, and that's as high as ever.

'Fortunately,' Mr. Mowll went on, 'my own little savings were not in Eldorado stock. But my employment is gone, I suppose. You will recommend me,

I hope, sir. And I do think that I've got some little reputation in the City.'

It was not for want of asserting himself that this worthy man failed, at any rate, of achieving his reputation. For twenty years he had magnified his office as confidential adviser of a great City light; among his friends and in his usual haunts he successfully posed as one burdened with the weight of affairs, laden with responsibility, and at all times oppressed by the importance of his thoughts. He carried a pocket-book which shut with a clasp; in the midst of a conversation he would stop, become abstracted, rush at the pocket-book, so to speak, confide a jotting to its care, shut it with a snap, and then go on with a smile and an excuse. Some said that he stood in with Gabriel Cassilis; all thought that he shared his secrets, and gave advice when asked for it.

As a matter of fact, he was a clerk, and had always been a clerk; but he was a clerk who knew a few things which might have been awkward if told generally. He had a fair salary, but no confidence, no advice, and not much more real knowledge of what his chief was doing than any outsider. And in this tremendous smash it was a great consolation to him to reflect that the liabilities repre-

sented an amount for which it was really a credit to fail.

Mr. Mowll has since got another place where the transactions are not so large, but perhaps his personal emoluments greater. In the evenings he will talk of the great failure.

'We stood to win,' he will say, leaning back with a superior smile,—'we stood to win 260,000*l*. We lost a million and a quarter. I told him not to hang on too long. Against my advice he did. I remember —ah, only four days before it happened—he said to me, "Mowll, my boy," he said, "I've never known you wrong yet. But for once I fancy my own opinion. We've worked together for twenty years," he said, "and you've the clearest head of any man I ever saw," he said. "But here I think you're wrong. And I shall hold on for another day or two," he said. Ah, little he knew what a day or two would bring forth! And he hasn't spoken since. Plays with his little boy, and goes about in a Bath-chair. What a man he was! and what a pair—if I may say so—we made between us among the bulls and the bears! Dear me, dear me!'

It may be mentioned at once that everything was at once given up; the house in Kensington-palace-gardens, with its costly furniture, its carriages, plate,

library, and pictures. Mr. Cassilis signed whatever documents were brought for signature without hesitation, provided a copy of his own signature was placed before him. Otherwise he could not write his name.

And never a single word of lamentation, reproach, or sorrow. The past was, and is still, dead to him; all the past except one thing, and that is ever with him.

For sixty years of his life, this man of the City, whose whole desire was to make money, to win in the game which he played with rare success and skill, regarded bankruptcy as the one thing to be dreaded, or at least to be looked upon, because it was absurd to dread it, as a thing bringing with it the whole of dishonour. Not to meet your engagements was to be in some sort a criminal. And now he was proclaimed as one who could not meet his engagements.

If he understood what had befallen him he did not care about it. The trouble was slight indeed in comparison with the other disaster. The honour of his wife and the legitimacy of his child—these were gone; and the man felt what it is that is greater than money gained or money lost.

The blow which fell upon him left his brain

clear while it changed the whole course of his thoughts and deprived him partially of memory. But it destroyed his power of speech. That rare and wonderful disease which seems to attack none but the strongest, which separates the brain from the tongue, takes away the knowledge and the sense of language, and kills the power of connecting words with things, while it leaves that of understanding what is said—the disease which doctors call Aphasia—was upon Mr. Gabriel Cassilis.

In old men this is an incurable disease. Gabriel Cassilis will never speak again. He can read, listen, and understand, but he can frame no words with his lips nor write them with his hand. He is a prisoner who has free use of his limbs. He is separated from the world by a greater gulf than that which divides the blind and the deaf from the rest of us, because he cannot make known his thoughts, his wants, or his wishes.

It took some time to discover what was the matter with him. Patients are not often found suffering from aphasia, and paralysis was the first name given to his disease.

But it was very early found out that Mr. Cassilis understood all that was said to him, and by degrees they learned what he liked and what he disliked.

Victoria Cassilis sat up-stairs, waiting for something—she knew not what—to happen. Her maid told her that Mr. Cassilis was ill; she made no reply; she did not ask to see him; she did not ask for any further news of him. She sat in her own room for two days waiting.

Then Joseph Jagenal asked if he might see her.

She refused at first; but on hearing that he proposed to stay in the house till she could receive him, she gave way.

He came from Lawrence, perhaps. He would bring her a message of some kind; probably a menace.

'You have something to say to me, Mr. Jagenal?' Her face was set hard, but her eyes were wistful. He saw that she was afraid. When a woman is afraid, you may make her do pretty well what you please.

'I have a good deal to tell you, Mrs. Cassilis; and I am sorry to say it is of an unpleasant nature.

'I have heard,' he went on, 'from Mr. Colquhoun that you made a remarkable statement in the presence of Miss Fleming, and in the hearing of Mr. Cassilis.'

'Lawrence informed you correctly, I have no doubt,' she replied coldly.

'That statement of course was untrue,' said Joseph, knowing that no record ever was more true. 'And therefore I venture to advise—'

'On the part of Lawrence?'

'In the name of Mr. Colquhoun, partly; partly in your own interest—'

'Go on, if you please, Mr. Jagenal.'

'Believing that statement to be untrue,' he repeated, 'for otherwise I could not give this advice, I recommend to all parties concerned—silence. Your husband's paralysis is attributed to the shock of his bankruptcy—'

'His what?' cried Victoria, who had heard as yet nothing of the City disaster.

'His bankruptcy. Mr. Cassilis is ruined.'

'Ruined! Mr. Cassilis!'

She was startled out of herself.

Ruined! The thought of such disaster had never once crossed her brains. Ruined! That Colossus of wealth—the man whom she married for his money, while secretly she despised his power of accumulating money!

'He is ruined, Mrs. Cassilis, and hopelessly. I have read certain papers which he put into my hands this morning. It is clear to me that his mind has been for some weeks agitated by certain

anonymous letters which came to him every day, and accused you—pardon me, Mrs. Cassilis—accused you of—of infidelity. The letters state that there is a secret of some kind connected with your former acquaintance with Mr. Colquhoun; that you have been lately in the habit of receiving him or meeting him every day; that you were in his chambers one evening when Mr. Cassilis called; with other particulars extremely calculated to excite jealousy and suspicion. Lastly, he was sent by the writer to Twickenham. The rest, I believe, you know.'

She made no reply.

'There can be no doubt, not the least doubt, that had your husband's mind been untroubled, this would never have happened. The disaster is due to his jealousy.'

'I could kill her!' said Mrs. Cassilis, clenching her fist. 'I could kill her!'

'Kill whom?'

'The woman who wrote those letters. It was a woman. No man could have done such a thing. A woman's trick. Go on.'

'There is nothing more to say. How far other people are involved with your husband, I cannot tell. I am going now into the City to find out if I can. Your wild words, Mrs. Cassilis, and your unguarded

conduct have brought about misfortunes on which you little calculated. But I am not here to reproach you.'

'You are my husband's man of business, I suppose,' she replied coldly—'a paid servant of his. What you say has no importance, nor what you think. What did Lawrence bid you tell me?'

Joseph Jagenal's face clouded for a moment. But what was the good of feeling resentment with such a woman, and in such a miserable business?

'You have two courses open to you,' he went on. 'You may, by repeating the confession you made in the hearing of Mr. Cassilis, draw upon yourself such punishment as the Law, provided the confession be true, can inflict. That will be a grievous thing to you. It will drive you out of society, and brand you as a criminal; it will lock you up for two years in prison; it will leave a stigma never to be forgotten or obliterated; it means ruin far, far worse than what you have brought on Mr. Cassilis. On the other hand, you may keep silence. This at least will secure the legitimacy of your boy, and will keep for you the amount settled on you at your marriage. But you may choose. If the statement you made is true, of course I can be no party to compounding a felony—'

'And Lawrence,' she interposed. 'What does Lawrence say?'

'In any case Mr. Colquhoun will leave England at once.'

'He will marry that Phillis girl? You may tell him,' she hissed out, 'that I will do anything and suffer anything rather than consent to his marrying her, or any one else.'

'Mr. Colquhoun informs me further,' pursued the crafty lawyer, 'that, for some reason only known to himself, he will never marry during the life of a certain person. Phillis Fleming will probably marry the Honourable Mr. Ronald Dunquerque.'

She buried her head in her hands, not to hide any emotion, for there was none to hide, but to think. Presently she rose, and said,

'Take me to—my husband, if you please.'

Joseph Jagenal, as a lawyer, is tolerably well versed in such wickednesses and deceptions as the human heart is capable of. At the same time, he acknowledges to himself that the speech made by Victoria Cassilis to her husband, and the manner in which it was delivered, surpassed anything he had ever experienced or conceived.

Gabriel Cassilis was sitting in an arm-chair near his table. In his arms was his infant son, a child

of a year old, for whose amusement he was dangling a bunch of keys. The nurse was standing beside him.

When his wife opened the door he looked up, and there crossed his face a sudden expression of such repulsion, indignation, and horror, that the lawyer fairly expected the lady to give way altogether. But she did not. Then Mrs. Cassilis motioned the nurse to leave them, and Victoria said what she had come to say. She stood at the table, in the attitude of one who commands respect rather than one who entreats pardon. Her accentuation was precise, and her words as carefully chosen as if she had written them down first. But her husband held his eyes down, as if afraid of meeting her gaze. You would have called him a culprit waiting for reproof and punishment.

'I learn to-day for the first time that you have suffered from certain attacks made upon me by an anonymous writer; I learn also for the first time, and to my great regret, that you have suffered in fortune as well as in health. I have myself been too ill in mind and body to be told anything. I am come to say at once that I am sorry if any rash words of mine have given you pain, or any foolish actions of mine have given you reason for jealousy.

The exact truth is that Lawrence Colquhoun and I were once engaged. The breaking off of that engagement caused me at the time the greatest unhappiness. I resolved then that he should never be engaged to any other girl if I could prevent it by any means in my power. My whole action of late, which appeared to you as if I was running after an old lover, was the prevention of his engagement, which I determined to break off, with Phillis Fleming. In the heat of my passion I used words which were not true. They occurred to me at the moment. I said he was my husband. I meant to have said my promised husband.

'You now know, Mr. Cassilis, the whole secret. I am deeply humiliated in having to confess my revengeful spirit. I am punished in your affliction.'

Always herself; always her own punishment.

'We can henceforth, I presume, Mr. Cassilis, resume our old manner of life.'

Mr. Cassilis made no answer, but he patted the head of his child, and Joseph Jagenal saw the tears running down his cheeks. For he knew that the woman lied to him.

'For the sake of the boy, Mr. Cassilis,' the lawyer pleaded, 'let things go on as before.'

He made no sign.

'Will you let me say something for you in the interests of the child?'

He nodded.

'Then, Mrs. Cassilis, your husband consents that there shall be no separation and no scandal. But it will be advisable for you both that there shall be as little intercourse as possible. Your husband will breakfast and dine by himself, and occupy his own apartments. You are free, provided you live in the same house and keep up appearances, to do whatever you please. But you will not obtrude your presence upon your husband.'

Mr. Cassilis nodded again. Then he sought his dictionary, and hunted for a word. It was the word he had first found, and was 'Silence.'

'Yes; you will also observe strict silence on what has passed at Twickenham, here or elsewhere. Should that silence not be observed, the advisers of Mr. Cassilis will recommend such legal measures as may be necessary.'

Again Gabriel Cassilis nodded. He had not once looked up at his wife since that first gaze, in which he concentrated the hatred and loathing of his speechless soul.

'Is that all?' asked Victoria Cassilis. 'Or have we more arrangements?'

'That is all, madam,' said Joseph, opening the door with great ceremony.

She went away as she had come, with cold haughtiness. Nothing seemed to touch her; not her husband's misery; not his ruin; not the sight of her child. One thing only pleased her. Lawrence Colquhoun would not marry during her lifetime. Bah! she would live a hundred years, and he should never marry at all.

In her own room was her maid.

'Tomlinson,' said Mrs. Cassilis—in spite of her outward calm, her nerves were strung to the utmost, and she felt that she must speak to some one—'Tomlinson, if a woman wrote anonymous letters about you, if those letters brought misery and misfortune, what would you do to that woman?'

'I do not know, ma'am,' said Tomlinson, whose cheeks grew white.

'I will kill her, Tomlinson! I will kill her! I will get those letters and prove the handwriting, and find that woman out. I will devote my life to it, and I will have no mercy on her when I have found her. I will kill her—somehow—by poison—by stabbing—somehow! Don't tremble, woman; I don't mean you. And, Tomlinson, forget what I have said.'

Tomlinson could not forget. She tottered from the room, trembling in every limb.

The wretched maid had her revenge. In full and overflowing measure. And yet she was not satisfied. The exasperating thing about revenge is that it never does satisfy, but leaves you at the end as angry as at the beginning. Your enemy is crushed; you have seen him tied to a stake, as is the pleasant wont of the Red Indian, and stuck arrows, knives, and red-hot things into him. These hurt so much that he is glad to die. But he is dead, and you can do no more to him. And it seems a pity, because if you had kept him alive, you might have thought of other and more dreadful ways of revenge. These doubts will occur to the most revenge-satiated Christian, and they lead to self-reproach. After all, one might just as well forgive a fellow at once.

Mrs. Cassilis was a selfish and heartless woman. All the harm that was done to her was the loss of her great wealth. And what had her husband done to Tomlinson that he should be stricken? And what had others done who were involved with him in the great disaster?

Tomlinson was so terrified, however, by the look which crossed her mistress's face that she went away

that very evening; pretended to have received a telegram from Liverpool; when she got there wrote for boxes and wages, with a letter in somebody else's writing, *for a reason*, to her mistress, and then went to America, where she had relations. She lives now in a city of the Western States, where her brother keeps a store. She is a leader in her religious circle; and I think that if she were to see Victoria Cassilis by any accident in the streets of that city, she would fly again, and to the farthest corners of the earth.

So much for revenge; and I do hope that Tomlinson's example will be laid to heart, and pondered by other lady's-maids whose mistresses are selfish and sharp-tempered.

CHAPTER XV.

'Farewell to all my greatness.'

THE last day of Gilead Beck's wealth. He rose as unconscious of his doom as that frolicsome kid whose destiny brought the tear to Delia's eye. Had he looked at the papers he would at least have ascertained that Gabriel Cassilis was ruined. But he had a rooted dislike to newspapers and never looked at them. He classed the editor of the *Times* with Mr. Huggins of Clearville or Mr. Van Cott of Chicago, but supposed that he had a larger influence. Politics he despised; criticism was beyond him; with social matters he had no concern; and it would wound the national self-respect were we to explain how carelessly he regarded matters which to Londoners seem of world-wide importance.

On this day Gilead rose early because there was a good deal to look after. His breakfast was fixed for eleven—a real breakfast. At six he was dressed, and making, in his mind's eye, the arrangements for seating his guests. Mr. and Mrs. Cassilis, Mrs.

L'Estrange and Phillis, Lawrence Colquhoun, Ladds, and Jack Dunquerque—all his most intimate friends were coming. He had also invited the Twins, but a guilty conscience made them send an excuse. They were now sitting at home, sober by compulsion and in great wretchedness, as has been seen.

The breakfast was to be held in the same room in which he once entertained the men of genius, but the appointments were different. Gilead Beck now went in for flowers, to please the ladies. Flowers in June do not savour of ostentation. Also for fruit; strawberries, apricots, cherries, and grapes in early June are not things quite beyond precedent, and his conscience acquitted him of display which might seem shoddy. And when the table was laid, with its flowers and fruit and dainty cold dishes garnished with all sorts of pretty things, it was, he felt, a work of art which reflected the highest credit on himself and everybody concerned.

Gilead Beck was at great peace with himself that morning. He was resolved on putting into practice at once some of those schemes which the Golden Butterfly demanded as loudly as it could whisper. He would start that daily paper which should be independent of commercial success; have no advertisements; boil down the news; do without long

leaders; and always speak the truth, without evasion, equivocation, suppression, or exaggeration. A miracle in journalism. He would run that Great National Drama which should revive the ancient glories of the stage. And for the rest he would be guided by circumstances, and when a big thing had to be done he would step in with his Pile, and do that big thing by himself.

There was in all this perhaps a little over-rating the power of the Pile; but Gilead Beck was, after all, only human. Think what an inflation of dignity, brother De Pauper-et-egens, would follow in your own case on the acquisition of fifteen hundred pounds a day.

Another thing pleased our Gilead. He knew that in his own country the difficulty of getting into what he felt to be the best society would be insuperable. The society of shoddy, the companionship with the quickly-grown rich, and the friendship of the gilded bladder are in the reach of every wealthy man. But Gilead was a man of finer feelings; he wanted more than this; he wanted the friendship of those who were born in the purple of good breeding. In New York he could not have got this. In London he did get it. His friends were ladies and gentlemen; they not only tolerated him, but they liked

him; they were people to whom he could give nothing, but they courted his society, and this pleased him more than any other part of his grand Luck. There was no great merit in their liking the man. Rude as his life had been, he was gifted with the tenderest and kindest heart; lowly born and roughly bred, he was yet a man of boundless sympathies. And because he had kept his self-respect throughout, and was ashamed of nothing, he slipped easily and naturally into the new circle, picking up without difficulty what was lacking of external things. Yet he was just the same as when he landed in England; with the same earnest, almost solemn, way of looking at things; the same gravity; the same twang which marked his nationality. He affected nothing and pretended nothing; he hid nothing and was ashamed of nothing; he paraded nothing, and wanted to be thought no other than the man he was—the ex-miner, ex-adventurer, ex-everything, who by a lucky stroke hit upon Ile, and was living on the profits. And perhaps in all the world there was no happier man than Gilead Beck on that bright June morning, which was to be the last day of his grandeur. A purling stream of content murmured and babbled hymns of praise in his heart. He had no fears; his nerves were strong;

he expected nothing but a continuous flow of prosperity and happiness.

The first to arrive was Jack Dunquerque. Now if this youth had read the papers he would have been able to communicate some of the fatal news. But he had not, because he was full of Phillis. And if any rumour of the Eldorado collapse smote his ears, it smote them unnoticed, because he did not connect Eldorado with Gilead Beck. What did it matter to this intolerably selfish young man how many British speculators lost their money by the Eldorado smash when he was going to meet Phillis? After all, the round world and all that is therein do really rotate about a pole—of course invisible—which goes through every man's own centre of gravity, and sticks out in a manner which may be felt by him. And the reason why men have so many different opinions is, I am persuaded, this extraordinary, miraculous, multitudinous, simultaneous revolution of the earth upon her million axes. Enough for Jack that Phillis was coming—Phillis whom he had not seen since the discovery—more memorable to him than any made by Traveller or Physicist—of the Coping-stone.

Jack came smiling and bounding up the stairs with agile spring—a good half-hour before the time. Perhaps Phillis might be before him. But she was not.

Then came Ladds. Gilead Beck saw that there was some trouble upon him, but forbore to ask him what it was. He wore his heavy inscrutable look, such as that with which he had been wont to meet gambling losses, untoward telegrams from Newmarket, and other buffetings of Fate.

Then came a letter from Mrs. Cassilis. Her husband was ill, and therefore she could not come.

Then came a letter from Lawrence Colquhoun. He had most important business in the City, and therefore he could not come.

'Seems like the Wedding-feast,' said Gilead irreverently. He was a little disconcerted by the defection of so many guests; but he had a leaf taken out of the table, and cheerfully waited for the remaining two.

They came at last, and I think the hearts of all three leaped within them at sight of Phillis's happy face. If it was sweet before, when Jack first met her, with the mysterious look of childhood on it, it was far sweeter now with the bloom and blush of conscious womanhood, the modest light of maidenly joy with which she met her lover. Jack rushed, so to speak, at her hand, and held it with a ridiculous shamelessness only excusable on the ground that they were almost in a family circle. Then Phillis

shook hands with Gilead Beck, with a smile of gratitude which meant a good deal more than preliminary thanks for the coming breakfast. Then it came to Ladds' turn. He turned very red—I do not know why—and whispered in his deepest bass,

'Know all about it. Lucky beggar, Jack! Wish you happiness!'

'Thank you, Captain Ladds,' Phillis replied, in her fearless fashion. 'I am very happy already. And so is Jack.'

'Wanted yesterday,' Ladds went on, in the same deep whisper—'wanted yesterday to offer some slight token of regard—found I couldn't—no more money—Eldorado smash—all gone—looked in boxes—found ring—once my mother's. Will you accept it?'

Phillis understood the ring, but she did not understand the rest of the speech. It was one of those old-fashioned rings set in pearls and brilliants. She was not by any means above admiring rings, and she accepted it with a cheerful alacrity.

'Sell up,' Ladds growled—'go away—do something—earn the daily crust—'

'But I don't understand—' she interrupted.

'Never mind. Tell you after breakfast. Tell you all presently.'

And then they went to breakfast.

It was rather a silent party. Ladds was, as might have been expected of a man who had lost his all, disposed to taciturnity. Jack and Phillis were too happy to talk much. Agatha L'Estrange and the host had all the conversation to themselves.

Agatha asked him if the dainty spread before them was the usual method of breakfast in America. Gilead Beck replied that of late years he had been accustomed to call a chunk of cold pork with a piece of bread a substantial breakfast, and that the same luxuries furnished him, as a rule, with dinner.

'The old life,' he said, 'had its points, I confess. For those who love cold pork it was one long round of delirious joy. And there was always the future to look forward to. Now the future has come I like it better. My experience, Mrs. L'Estrange, is that you may divide men into two classes—those who've got a future, and those who haven't. I belonged to the class who had a future. Sometimes we miss it. And I feel like to cry whenever I think of the boys with a bright future before them, who fell in the War at my side, not in tens, but in hundreds. Sometimes we find it. I found it when I struck Ile. And always, for those men, whether the future come early or whether it come late, it lies bright and shinin' before them, and so they never lose hope.'

'And have women no future as well as men, Mr. Beck?' asked Phillis.

'I don't know, Miss Fleming. But I hope you have. Before my Golden Butterfly came to me I was lookin' forward for my future, and I knew it was bound to come in some form or other. I looked forward for thirty years; my youth was gone when it came, and half my manhood. But it is here.'

'Perhaps, Mr. Beck,' said Mrs. L'Estrange, who was a little *rococo* in her morality, 'it is well that this great fortune did not come to you when you were younger.'

'You think that, madam? Perhaps it is so. To fool around New York would be a poor return for the Luck of the Butterfly. Yes; better as it is. Providence knows very well what to be about; it don't need promptin' from us. And impatience is no manner of use, not the least use in the world. At the right time the Luck comes; at the right time the Luck will go. Yes'—he looked solemnly round the table—'some day the Luck is bound to go. When it goes, I hope I shall be prepared for the change. But if it goes to-morrow, it cannot take away, Mrs. L'Estrange, the memory of these few months, your friendship, and yours, Miss Fleming. There's things which do not depend upon Ile; more

things than I thought formerly; things which money cannot do. More than once I thought my pile ought to find it easy to do somethin' useful before the time comes. But the world is a more tangled web than I used to think.'

'There are always the poor among us,' said the good Agatha.

'Yes, madam, that is true. And there always will be. More you give to the poor, more you make them poor. There's folks goin' up and folks goin' down. You in England help the folks goin' down. You make them fall easy. I want to help the folks goin' up.'

At this moment a telegram was brought for him.

It was from his London bankers. They informed him that a cheque for a small sum had been presented, but that his balance was already overdrawn; and that they had received a telegram from New York, on which they would be glad to see him.

Gilead Beck read it, and could not understand it. The cheque was for his own weekly account at the hotel.

He laid the letter aside, and went on with his exposition of the duties and responsibilities of wealth. He pointed out to Mrs. L'Estrange, who alone listened to him—Jack was whispering to Phillis, and

Ladds was absorbed in thoughts of his own—that when he arrived in London he was possessed with the idea that all he had to do, in order to protect, benefit, and advance humanity, was to found a series of institutions; that, in the pursuit of this idea, he had visited and examined all the British institutions which he could hear of; and that his conclusions were that they were all a failure.

'For,' he concluded, 'what have you done? Your citizens need not save money, because a hospital, a church, an almshouse, a dispensary, and a workhouse stand in every parish; they need not be moral, because there's homes for the repentant in every other street. All around they are protected by charity and the State. Even if they get knocked down in the street, they need not fight, because there's a policeman within easy hail. You breed your poor, Mrs. L'Estrange, and you take almighty care to keep them always with you. In my country he who can work and won't work goes to the wall; he starves, and a good thing too. Here he gets fat.

'Every way,' he went on, 'you encourage your people to do nothing. Your clever young men get a handsome income for life, I am told, at Oxford and Cambridge, if they pass one good examination. For us the examination is only the beginning. Your

clergymen get a handsome income for life, whether they do their work or not. Ours have got to go on preachin' well and livin' well; else we want to know the reason why. You give your subalterns as much as other nations give their colonels; you set them down to a grand mess every day as if they were all born lords. You keep four times as many naval officers as you want, and ten times as many generals. It's all waste and lavishin' from end to end. And as for your Royal Family, I reckon that I'd find a dozen families in Massachusetts alone who'd run the Royal Mill for a tenth of the money. I own they wouldn't have the same gracious manners,' he added. 'And your Princess is—wal, if Miss Fleming were Princess, she couldn't do the part better. Perhaps gracious manners are worth paying for.'

Here another telegram was brought him.

It was from New York. It informed him in plain and intelligible terms that his wells had all run dry, that his credit was exhausted, and that no more bills would be honoured.

He read this aloud with a firm voice and unfaltering eye. Then he looked round him, and said solemnly,

'The time has come. It's come a little sooner than I expected. But it has come at last.'

He was staggered, but he remembered something which consoled him.

'At least,' he said, 'if the income is gone, the Pile remains. That's close upon half a million of English money. We can do something with that. Mr. Cassilis has got it all for me.'

'Who?' cried Ladds eagerly.

'Mr. Gabriel Cassilis, the great English financier.'

'He is ruined,' said Ladds. 'He has failed for two millions sterling. If your money is in his hands—'

'Part of it, I believe, was in Eldorado stock.'

'The Eldoradians cannot pay their interest. And the stock has sunk to nothing. Gabriel Cassilis has lost all my money in it—at least, I have lost it on his recommendation.'

'Your money all gone, Tommy?' cried Jack.

'All, Jack—Ladds' Aromatic Cocoa—Fragrant—Nutritious—no use now—business sold twenty years ago. Proceeds sunk in Eldorado stock. Nothing but the smell left.'

And while they were gazing in each other's face with mute bewilderment, a third messenger arrived with a letter.

It was from Mr. Mowll the secretary. It in-

formed poor Gilead that Mr. Gabriel Cassilis had drawn, in accordance with his power of attorney, upon him to the following extent. A bewildering mass of figures followed, at the bottom of which was the total —Gilead Beck's two million dollars. That, further, Gabriel Cassilis always, it appeared, acting on the wishes of Mr. Beck, had invested the whole sum in Eldorado stock. That, &c. He threw the letter on the table half unread. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he rose solemnly, and sought the corner of the room in which stood the safe containing the Emblem of his Luck. He opened it, and took out the box of glass and gold which held it. This was covered with a case of green leather. He carried it to the table. They all crowded round while he raised the leathern cover and displayed the Butterfly.

'Has any one,' he lifted his head and looked helplessly round,—'has any one felt an airthquake?'

For a strange thing had happened. The wings of the insect were lying on the floor of the box; the white quartz which formed its body had slipped from the gold wire which held it up, and the Golden Butterfly was in pieces.

He opened the box with a little gold key and took out the fragments of the two wings and the body.

'Gone!' he said. 'Broken!

"If this Golden Butterfly fall and break,
Farewell the Luck of Gilead P. Beck."

Your own lines, Mr. Dunquerque. Broken into little bits it is. The Ile run dry, the credit exhausted, and the Pile fooled away.'

No one spoke.

'I am sorry for you most, Mr. Dunquerque. I am powerful sorry, sir. I had hoped, with the assistance of Miss Fleming, to divide that Pile with you. Now, sir, I've got nothing. Not a red cent left to divide with a beggar.

'Mrs. L'Estrange,' he went on, 'those last words of mine were prophetic. When I am gone back to America—I suppose the odds and ends here will pay my passage—you'll remember that I said the Luck would some day go.'

It was all so sudden, so incomprehensible, that no one present had a word to say, either of sympathy or of sorrow.

Gilead Beck proceeded with his soliloquy:

'I've had a real high time for three months; the best three months in my life. Whatever happens more can't touch the memory of the last three months. I've met English ladies and made friends of English gentlemen. There's Amer'can ladies and Amer'can gentlemen, but I can't speak of them,

because I never went into their society. You don't find ladies and gentlemen in Empire City. And in all the trades I've turned my attention to, from school-keepin' to editing, there's not been one where Amer'can ladies cared to show their hand. That means that the Stars and Stripes may be as good as the Union Jack—come to know them.'

He stopped and pulled himself together with a laugh.

'I can't make it out somehow. Seems as if I'm in a dream. Is it real? Is the story of the Golden Butterfly a true story, or is it made up out of some man's brain?'

'It is real, Mr. Beck,' said Phillis, softly putting her hand in his. 'It is real. No one could have invented such a story. See, dear Mr. Beck, you that we all love so much, there is you in it and I am in it—and—and the Twins. Why, if people saw us all in a book they would say it was impossible. I am the only girl in all the civilised world who can neither read nor write—and Jack doesn't mind it—and you are the only man who ever found the Golden Butterfly. Indeed, it is all real.'

'It is all real, Beck,' Jack echoed. 'You have had the high time, and sorry indeed we are that it is over. But perhaps it is not all over. Surely some-

thing out of the two million dollars must have remained.'

Mr. Beck pointed sorrowfully to the three pieces which were the fragments of the Butterfly.

'Nothing is left,' he said. 'Nothing, except the solid gold that made his cage. And that will go to pay the hotel-bill.'

Mrs. L'Estrange looked on in silence. What was this quiet lady, this woman of even and uneventful life, to say in the presence of such misfortune?

Ladds held out his hand.

'Worth twenty of any of us,' he said. 'We are in the same boat.'

'And you too, Captain Ladds,' Gilead cried. 'It is worse than my own misfortune, because I am a rough man and can go back to the rough life. No, Mrs. L'Estrange—no, my dear young lady—I can't —not with the same light heart as before—you've spoiled me. I must strike out something new—away from Empire City and Ile and gold. I'm spoiled. It is not the cold chunk of pork that I am afraid of; it is the beautiful life and the sweetness that I'm going to lose. I said I hoped I should be prepared to meet the fall of my Luck—when it came. But I never thought it would come like this.'

'Stay with us, Mr. Beck,' said Phillis. 'Don't go back to the old life.'

'Stay with us,' said Jack. 'We will all live together.'

'Do not leave us, Mr. Beck,' said Mrs. L'Estrange. (Women can blush, although they may be past forty.) 'Stay here with your friends.'

He looked from one to the other, and something like a tear glittered in his eye. But he shook his head.

Then he took up the wings of the Butterfly, the pretty golden *lamina* cut in the perfect shape of a wing, marked and veined by Nature as if, for once, she was determined to show that she too could be an Artist and imitate herself. They lay in his hands, and he looked fondly at them.

'What shall I do with these?' he said softly. 'They have been very good to me. They have given me the pleasantest hours of my life. They have made me dream of power as if I was autocrat of All the Russias. Say, Mrs. L'Estrange—since my chief pleasure has come through Mr. Dunquerque—may I offer the broken Butterfly to Miss Fleming?'

He laid the wings before her with a sweet sad smile. Jack took them up and looked at them. In the white quartz were the little holes where the wings

had fitted. He put them back in their old place—the wings in the quartz. They fitted exactly, and in a moment the Butterfly was as it had always been.

Jack deftly bent round it again the golden wire which held it to the golden flower. Singular to relate, the wire fitted like the wings just the same as before, and the Butterfly vibrated on its perch again.

'It's wonderful!' cried Gilead Beck. 'It's the Luck I've given away. It's gone to you, Miss Fleming. But it won't take the form of Ile.'

'Then take it back, Mr. Beck,' cried Phillis.

'No, young lady. The Luck left me of its own accord. That was shown when the Butterfly fell off the wires. It is yours now, yours; and you will make a better use of it.

'I think,' he went on, with his hand upon the golden case,—'I think there's a Luck in the world which I never dreamed of, a better Luck than Ile. Mrs. L'Estrange, you know what sort of Luck I mean?'

'Yes, Mr. Beck, I know,' she replied.

Phillis laid her hands on Jack's shoulder, while his arm stole round her waist.

'It is Love, Mr. Beck,' said the girl. 'Yes;

that is the best Luck in all the world, and I am sure of it.'

Jack stooped and kissed her. The simplicity and innocence of this maiden went to Gilead Beck's heart. They were a religion to him, an education. In the presence of that guileless heart all earthly thoughts dropped from his soul, and he was, like the girl before him, pure in heart and clean in memory. That is indeed the sweet enchantment of innocence; a bewitchment out of which we need never awake unless we like.

'Take the case and all, Miss Fleming,' said Gilead Beck.

But she would not have the splendid case with its thick plate glass and solid gold pillars.

Then Gilead Beck brought out the little wooden box, the same in which the Golden Butterfly lay when he ran from the Bear on the slopes of the Sierra Nevada. And Phillis laid her new treasure in the cotton wool and slung the box by its steel chain round her neck, laughing in a solemn fashion.

While they talked thus sadly, the door opened, and Lawrence Colquhoun stood before them.

Agatha cried out when she saw him, because he was transformed. The lazy insouciant look was gone; a troubled look was in its place. Worse than

a troubled look—a look of misery; a look of self-reproach; a look as of a criminal brought to the bar and convicted.

'Lawrence!' cried Mrs. L'Estrange.

He came into the room in a helpless sort of way, his hands shaking before him, like those of some half-blind old man.

'Phillis,' he said, in a hoarse voice, 'forgive me!'

'What have I to forgive, Lawrence?'

'Forgive me!' he repeated humbly. 'Nay—you do not understand. Dunquerque, it is for you to speak—for all of you—you all love Phillis. Agatha—you love her—you used to love me too. How shall I tell you?'

'I think we guess,' said Gilead.

'I did it for the best, Phillis. I thought to double your fortune. Cassilis said I should double it. I thought to double my own. I put all your money, child, every farthing of your money, in Eldorado stock by his advice, and all my own too. And it is all gone—every penny of it gone.'

Jack Dunquerque clasped Phillis tighter by the hand.

She only laughed.

'Why, Lawrence,' she said, 'what if you have

lost all my money? Jack doesn't care. Do you, Jack?'

'No, darling, no,' said Jack. And at the moment—such was the infatuation of this young man—he really did not care.

'Lawrence,' said Agatha, 'you acted for the best. Don't, dear Lawrence, don't trouble too much. Captain Ladds has lost all his fortune too—and Mr. Beck has lost all his—and we are all ruined together.'

'All ruined together!' echoed Gilead Beck, looking at Mrs. L'Estrange. 'Gabriel Cassilis is a wonderful man. I always said he was a wonderful man.'

In the evening the three ruined men sat all together in Gilead's room.

'Nothing saved, Colquhoun?' asked Ladds, after a long pause.

'Nothing. The stock was 70 when I bought in: 70 at 10 per cent. It is now anything you like—4, 6, 8, 16—what you please—because no one will buy it.'

'Wal,' said Gilead Beck, 'it does seem rough on us all, and perhaps it's rougher on you two than it is on me. But to think, only to think, that such an

almighty Pile should be fooled away on a darned half-caste State like Eldorado! And for all of us to believe Mr. Gabriel Cassilis a whole-souled high-toned speculator.

'Once I thought,' he continued, 'that we Amer'-cans must be the Ten Tribes; because, I said, nobody but one out of the Ten Tribes would get such a providential lift as the Golden Butterfly. Gentlemen, my opinions are changed since this morning. I believe we're nothing better, not a single cent better, than one of the kicked-out Tribes. I may be an Amalekite, or I may be a Hivite; but I'm darned if I ever call myself again one of the children of Abraham.'

CHAPTER THE LAST.

'Whisper Love, ye breezes; sigh
In Love's content, soft air of morn;
Let eve in brighter sunsets die,
And day with brighter dawn be born.'

It is a week since the disastrous day. Gilead Beck has sold the works of art with which he intended to found his Grand National Collection; he has torn up his great schemes for a grand National Theatre, a grand National Paper; he has ceased to think, for the delectation of the Golden Butterfly, about improving the human race. His gratitude to that prodigy of Nature has so far cooled that he now considers it more in the light of a capricious sprite, a sort of Robin Goodfellow, than as a benefactor. He has also changed his views as to the construction of the round earth, and all that is therein. Ile, he says, may be found by other lucky adventurers; but Ile is not be depended on for a permanence. He would now recommend those who strike Ile to make their Pile as quickly as may be, and devote all their energies to the safety of that Pile. And as to the human race, it may slide.

'What's the good,' he says to Jack Dunquerque, 'of helpin' up those that are bound to climb? Let them climb. And what's the good of tryin' to save those that are bound to fall? Let them fall. I'm down myself; but I mean to get up again.'

It is sad to record that Mr. Burls, the picture-dealer, refused to buy back again the great picture of 'Sisera and Jael.' No one would purchase that work at all. Mr. Beck offered it to the Langham Hotel as a gift. The directors firmly declined to accept it. When it was evident that this remarkable effort of genius was appreciated by no one, Gilead Beck resolved on leaving it where it was. It is rumoured that the manager of the hotel bribed the owner of a certain Regent-street restaurant to take it away; and I have heard that it now hangs, having been greatly cut down, on the wall of that establishment, getting its tones mellowed day by day with the steam of roast and boiled. As for the other pictures, Mr. Burls expressed his extreme sorrow that temporary embarrassment prevented him purchasing them back at the price given for them. He afterwards told Mr. Beck that the unprincipled picture-dealer who did ultimately buy them, at the price of so much a square foot, and as second-rate copies, was a disgrace to his honourable profession. This, he said, stood high

in public estimation for truth, generosity, and fair dealing. None but genuine works came from his own establishment; and what he called a Grooze was a Grooze, and nothing but a Grooze.

As for the Pile, Gilead's power of attorney had effectually destroyed that. There was not a cent left; not one single coin to rub against another. All was gone in that great crash.

He called upon Gabriel Cassilis. The financier smiled upon him with his newly-born air of sweetness and trust; but, as we have seen, he could no longer speak, and there was nothing in his face to express sorrow or repentance.

Gilead found himself, when all was wound up, the possessor of that single cheque which Joseph Jagenal had placed in his hands, and which, most fortunately for himself, he had not paid into the bank.

Four hundred pounds. With that, at forty-five, he was to begin the world again. After all, the majority of mankind at forty-five have much less than four hundred pounds.

He heard from Canada that the town he had built, the whole of which belonged to him, was deserted again. There was a quicker rush out of it than into it. It stands there now, more lonely than

Empire City—its derricks and machinery rusting and dropping to pieces, the houses empty and neglected, the land relapsing into its old condition of bog and marsh. But Gilead Beck will never see it again.

He kept away from Twickenham during this winding-up and settlement of affairs. It was a week later when, his mind at rest and his conscience clear of bills and doubts, because now there was nothing more to lose, he called at the house where he had spent so many pleasant hours.

Mrs. L'Estrange received him. She was troubled in look, and the traces of tears were on her face.

'It is a most onfortunate time,' Gilead said sympathetically; 'a most onfortunate time.'

'Blow after blow, Mr. Beck,' Agatha sobbed. 'Stroke upon stroke.'

'That is so, madam. They've got the knife well in, this time, and when they give it a twist we're bound to cry out. You've thought me selfish, I know, not to inquire before.'

'No, Mr. Beck; no. It is only too kind of you to think of us in your own overwhelming disaster. I have never spent so wretched a week. Poor Lawrence has literally not a penny left, except what he gets from the sale of his horses, pictures, and things.

Captain Ladds is the same; Phillis has no longer a farthing; and now, O dear, O dear, I am going to lose her altogether.'

'But when she marries Mr. Dunquerque you will see her often.'

'No, no. Haven't they told you? Jack has got almost nothing—only ten thousand pounds altogether; and they have made up their minds to emigrate. They are going to Virginia, where Jack will buy a small estate.'

'Is that so?' asked Gilead meditatively.

'Lawrence says that he and Captain Ladds will go away together somewhere; perhaps back to Empire City.'

'And you will be left alone—you, Mrs. L'Estrange—all alone in this country, and ruined. It mustn't be.' He straightened himself up, and looked round the room. 'It must not be, Mrs. L'Estrange. You know me partly—that is, you know the manner of man I wish to seem and try to be; you know what I have been. You do not know, because you cannot guess, the things which you have put into my head.'

Mrs. L'Estrange blushed and began to tremble. Could it be possible that he was actually going to—

He was.

'You and I together, Mrs. L'Estrange, are gone

to wreck in this almighty hurricane. I've got one or two thousand dollars left; perhaps you will have as much, perhaps *not*. Mrs. L'Estrange, will you think it presumptuous in a rough American—not an American gentleman by birth and raising—to offer you such protection and care as he can give to the best of women? We, too, will go to Virginia with Mr. Dunquerque and his wife; we will settle near them, and watch their happiness. The Virginians are a kindly folk, and love the English people, especially if they are of gentle birth. Say, Mrs. L'Estrange.'

'O Mr. Beck, I am forty years of age!'

'And I am five-and-forty.'

Just then Phillis and Jack burst into the room. They did not look at all like being ruined; they were wild with joy and good spirits.

'And you are going to Virginia, Mr. Dunquerque?' said Gilead. 'I am thinking of going too, if I can persuade this lady to go with me.'

'O Agatha, come with us!'

'Come with me,' corrected Gilead.

Then Phillis saw how things lay—what a change in Phillis, to see so much!—and half laughing, but more in seriousness than in mirth, threw her arms round Agatha's neck.

'Will you come, dear Agatha? He is a good

man, and he loves you; and we will all live near together, and be happy.'

Three short scenes to conclude my story.

It is little more than a year since Agatha L'Estrange, as shy and blushing as any maiden—much more shy than Phillis — laid her hand in Gilead's, with the confession, half sobbed out, 'And it isn't a mistake you are making; because I am not ruined at all. It is only you and these poor children and Lawrence.'

We are back again in Empire City. It is the early fall, September. The yellow leaves clothe all the forests with brown and gold; the sunlight strikes upon the peaks and ridges of the great Sierra, lights up the broad belt of wood, making shadows blacker than night, and lies along the grass-grown streets of the deserted Empire City. Two men in hunting-dress are making their way slowly through the grass and weeds that choke the pathway.

'Don't like it, Colquhoun,' says one; 'more ghostly than ever.'

They push on, and presently the foremost, Ladds, starts back with a cry.

'What is it?' asked Colquhoun.

They push aside the brambles, and behold a

skeleton. The body has been on its knees, but now only the bones are left. They are clothed in the garb of the celestial, and one side of the skull is broken in, as if with a shot.

'It must be my old friend Achow,' said Colquhoun calmly. 'See, he's been murdered.'

In the dead of night Ladds awakened Colquhoun.

'Can't help it,' he said; 'very sorry. Ghosts walking about the stairs. Says the ghost of Achow to the shade of Leeching, "No your piecy pidgin makee shootee me." Don't like ghosts, Colquhoun.'

Next morning they left Empire City. Ladds was firm in the conviction that he had heard and seen a Chinaman's ghost, and was resolute against stopping another night in the place.

Just outside the town they made another discovery.

'Good Lord!' cried Ladds, frightened out of sobriety of speech. 'It rains skeletons. Look there; he's beckoning!'

And, to be sure, before them was raised, with finger as of invitation, a skeleton hand.

This, too, belonged to a complete assortment of human bones clad in Chinese dress. By its side lay a rusty pistol. Lawrence picked it up.

'By gad!' he said, 'it's the same pistol I gave to Leeching. How do you read this story, Ladds?'

Ladds sat down and replied slowly. He said that he never did like reading ghost stories, and since the apparition of the murdered Achow, the night before, he should like them still less. Ghost stories, he said, are all very well until you come to see and hear a ghost. Now that he had a ghost story of his own—an original one in pigeon English—he did not intend ever to read another. Therefore Colquhoun must excuse him if he gave up the story of Leeching's skeleton entirely to his own reading. He then went on to say that he never had liked skeletons, and that he believed Empire City was nothing but a mouldy old churchyard without the church, while, as a cemetery, it wasn't a patch upon Highgate. And the mention of Highgate, he said, reminded him of Phillis; and he proposed they should both get to Virginia, and call upon Jack and his wife.

All this took time to explain; and meanwhile Lawrence was poking the butt-end of his gun about in the grass to see if there was anything more. There was something more. It was a bag of coarse yellow canvas, tied by a string round what had been the waist of a man. Lawrence cut the string, and opened the bag.

'We're in luck, Tommy. Look at this.'

It was the gold so laboriouly scraped together by the two Chinamen, which had caused, in a manner, the death of both.

'Lift it, Tommy.' Colquhoun grew excited at his find. 'Lift it—there must be a hundred and fifty ounces, I should think. It will be worth four or five hundred pounds. Here's a find!'

To this pair, who had only a year ago chucked away their thousands, the luck of picking up a bag of gold appeared something wonderful.

'Tommy,' said Colquhoun, 'I tell you what we will do. We will add this little windfall to what Beck would call your little pile and my little pile. And we'll go and buy a little farm in Virginia, too; and we will live there close to Jack and Phillis. Agatha will like it, too. And there's capital shooting.'

Gabriel Cassilis and his wife reside at Brighton. The whole of the great fortune being lost, they have nothing but Victoria's settlement. That gives them a small income. 'Enough to subsist upon,' Victoria tells her friends. The old man—he looks very old and fragile now—is wheeled about in a chair on sunny days. When he is not being wheeled about he plays with his child, to whom he talks; that is,

pours out a stream of meaningless words, because he will never again talk coherently. Victoria is exactly the same as ever—cold, calm, and proud. Nor is there anything whatever in her manner to her husband, if she accidentally meet him, to show that she has the slightest sorrow, shame, or repentance for the catastrophe she brought about. Joseph Jagenal is working the great Dyson will case for them, and is confident that he will get the testator's intentions, which can now be only imperfectly understood, set aside, when Gabriel Cassilis will once more become comparatively wealthy.

On a verandah in sunny Virginia, Agatha Beck sits quietly working, and crooning some old song in sheer content and peace of heart. Presently she lifts her head as she hears a step. That smile with which she greets her husband shows that she is happy in her new life. Gilead Beck is in white, with a broad straw hat, because it is in hot September. In his hand he has a letter.

'Good news, wife; good news,' he says. 'Jack and Phillis are coming here to-day, and will stay till Monday. Will be here almost as soon as the note. Baby coming, too.'

'Of course, Gilead,' says Agatha, smiling su-

perior. 'As if the dear girl would go anywhere without her little Philip. And six weeks old to-morrow.'

(Everybody who has appreciated how very far from clever Jack Dunquerque was will be prepared to hear that he committed an enormous etymological blunder in the baptism of his boy, whom he named Philip, in the firm belief that Philip was the masculine form of Phillis.)

'Here they come! Here they are!'

Jack comes rattling up to the house in his American trap, jumps out, throws the reins to the boy, and hands out his wife with the child. Kisses and greetings.

Phillis seems, at first, unchanged, except perhaps that the air of Virginia has made her sweet delicacy of features more delicate. Yet look again, and you find that she has changed. She was a child when we saw her first; then we saw her grow into a maiden: she is a wife and a mother now.

She whispers her husband.

'All right, Phil dear.—Beck, you've got to shut your eyes for just one minute. No, turn your back so. Now you may look.'

Phillis has hung round the neck of her unconscious baby, by a golden chain, the Golden Butterfly.

It seems as strong and vigorous as ever; and as it lies upon the child's white dress, it looks as if it were poised for a moment's rest, but ready for flight.

'That Inseck!' said Gilead sentimentally. 'Wal, it's given me the best thing that a man can get'—he took the hand of his wife—'love and friendship. You are welcome, Phillis, to all the rest, provided that all the rest does not take away these.'

'Nay,' she said, her eyes filling with the gentle dew of happiness and content, 'I have all that I want for myself. I have my husband and my boy—my little, little Philip! I am more than happy; and so I give to tiny Phil all the remaining Luck of the Golden Butterfly.'

THE END.

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